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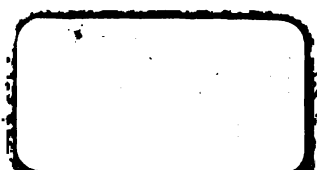
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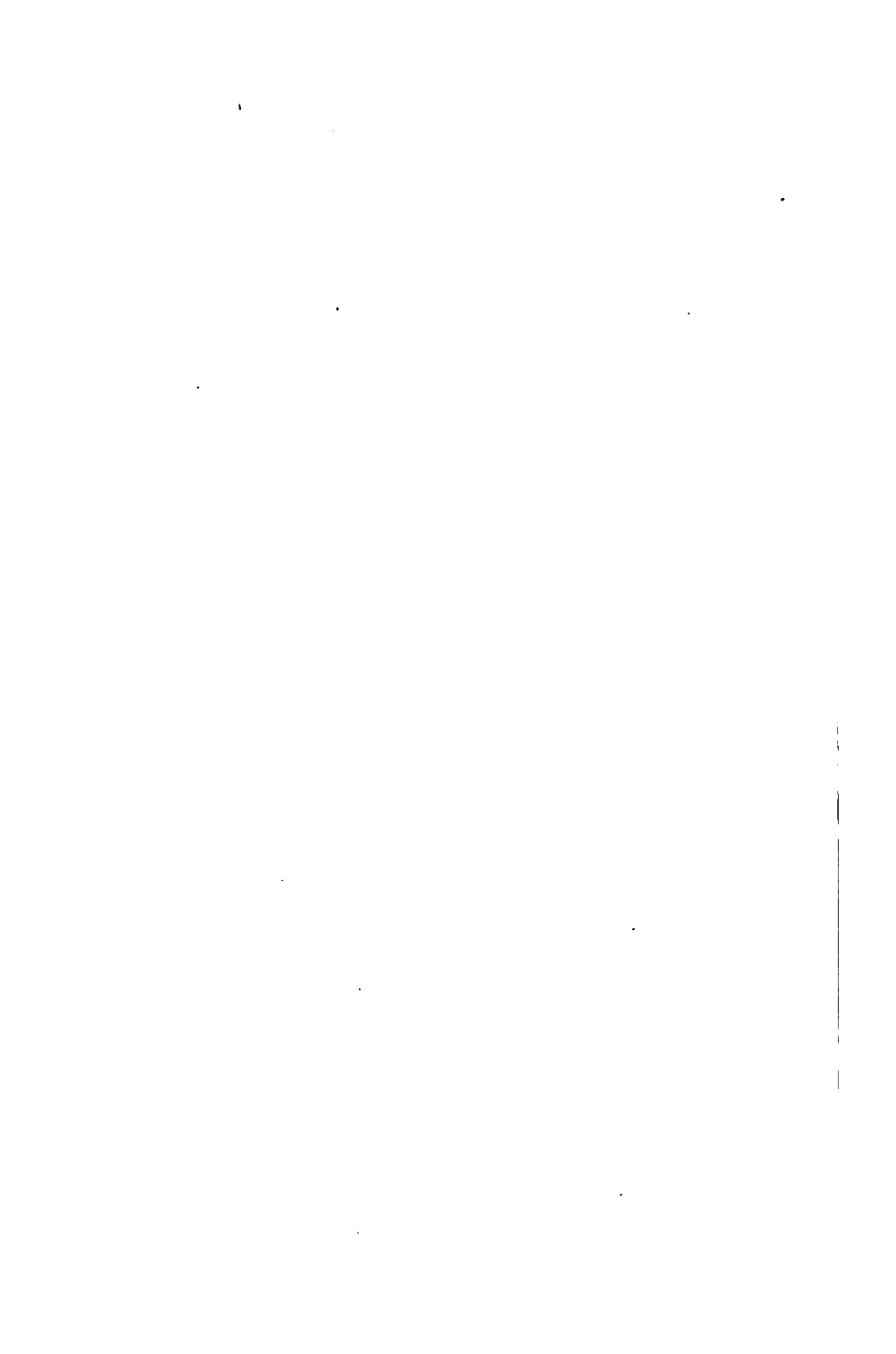
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BY  
FREDERICK FORREST GORDON

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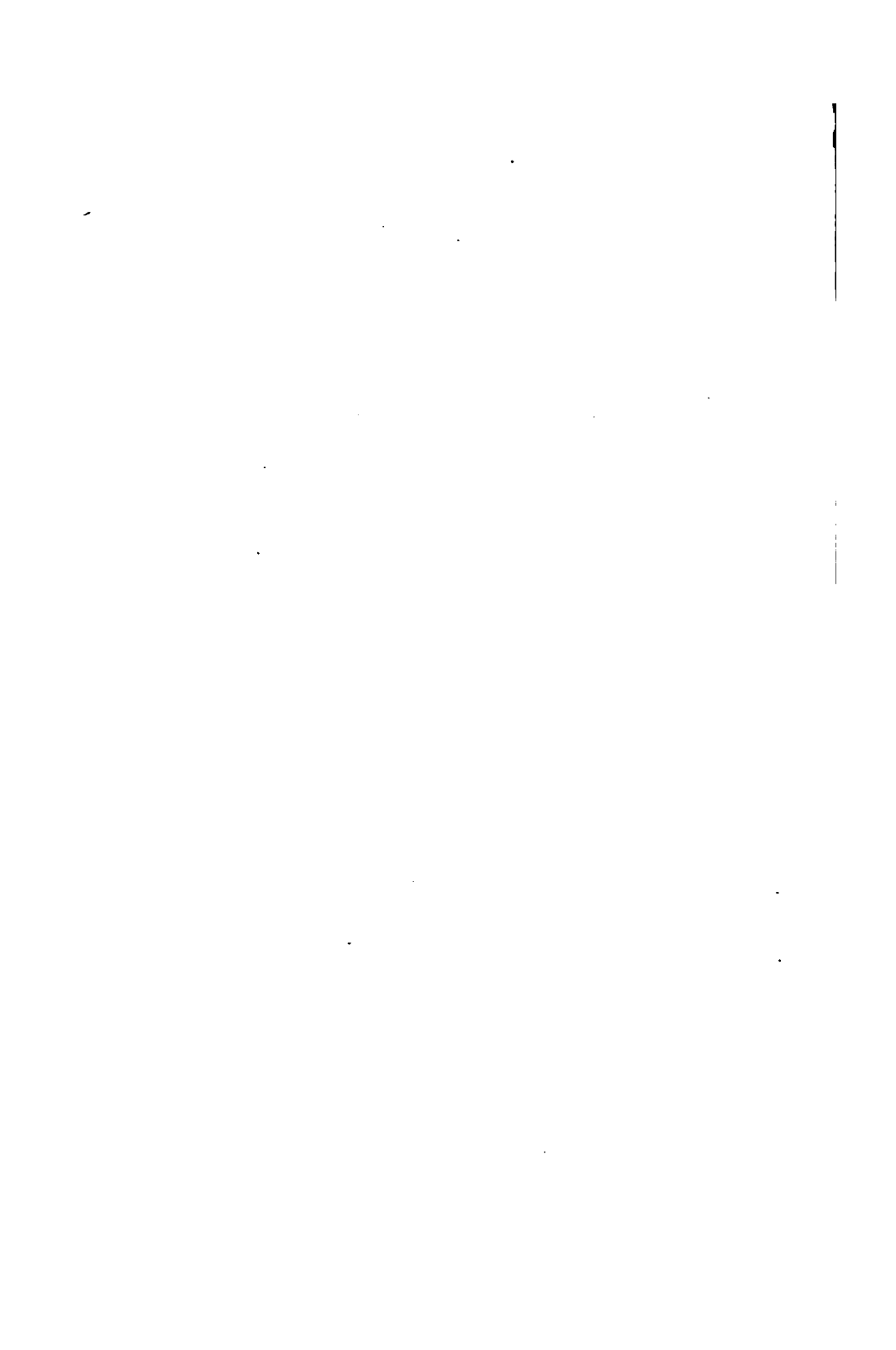




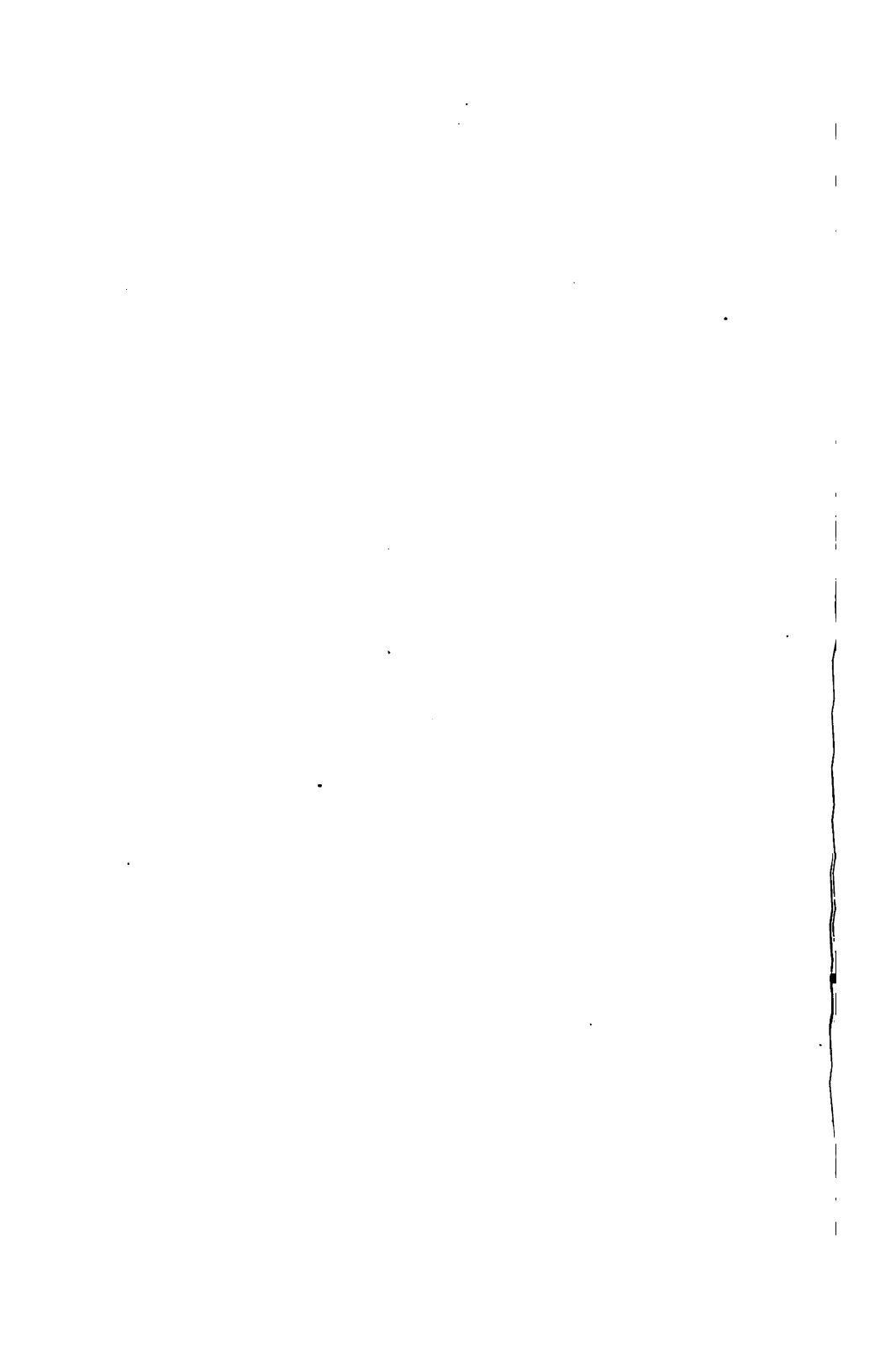




THE HEIRESS OF WYLMINGTON.



TO MY FRIEND  
KATE MAINWARING-SLADEN,  
I DEDICATE  
**This Book.**







" Absently she turned the leaves."

*Page 414.*





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4

THE  
HEIRESS OF WYLMINGTON.

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"Gwendolyn! Surely it is Gwendolyn!"

*Page 261.*

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THOMAS NELSON AND SONS,  
LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.



# THE HEIRESS OF WYLMINGTON.

*By*

*EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN,*

*Author of "Fighting the Good Fight," "Lady Temple's Grandchildren,"  
"True to the Last," "Torwood's Trust,"  
&c. &c.*

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"And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come.... But he said,  
It is I; be not afraid."—JOHN vi. 17, 20.

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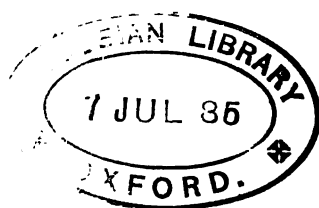
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THE  
HEIRESS OF WYLMINGTON.

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CHAPTER I.

THE HOME-COMING.

"DEAD! Oh no; not dead! It cannot, cannot be true! I will not believe it!"

Gwendolyn Maltby, richly clad in velvet and fur, stood in the great hall of Wylmington Manor. The well-appointed carriage that had brought her stood in the snow without, and men-servants were bringing in their young mistress's travelling bags, rug, and wraps.

But Gwendolyn stood in the centre of the hall as if turned to stone. She did not feel the icy wind which blew in upon her from the open door. She did not see the familiar faces of the old servants, who were compassionately regarding her from the end of the hall. She did not hear the murmur of sympathy and commiseration which arose from their lips. All she saw was the grave, steadfast face of the family doctor, who had met her upon the threshold; and all she heard were the words in which he had answered her wildly



imperative question, for the servants had not dared to say plainly to the young mistress that her father was really dead. She had learned the dreaded truth from Dr. Talbot's lips.

"He cannot be dead!" cried the girl, her white lips almost refusing to obey her will; "he cannot be dead yet! I had a letter from him yesterday morning, and he was quite well then. Your telegram came only six hours ago. He cannot be dead! Let me see him. He will surely wake when I kiss him and call him 'father.' Take me to him—I will go now. Take me!"

The imperious tone—imperious without being in any way discourteous—showed pretty plainly that, in spite of her youth, Gwendolyn Maltby was well used to command, and expected to be obeyed. Dr. Talbot, however, had no present intention of gratifying her wish; and placing her cold hand upon his arm, he led her gently, yet firmly, into a small, exquisitely furnished room, which opened from the hall, in which a dainty traveller's tea had been spread. Dr. Talbot had known Gwendolyn all her life, and treated her with a parental authority and kindness to which she submitted through force of long habit.

"My dear child," he said kindly, as he removed her heavy outer garment, and gently placed her in a chair, "this is a terrible blow, and you will need all your courage to bear it. Do not waste your strength needlessly. Do not try to fight against the truth. Sit still, and drink this tea. We will talk about it afterwards."

But Gwendolyn motioned the cup away almost fiercely, and said,—

“I cannot; it would choke me. Remember, I have only just heard. Tell me about it. Tell me now. I must hear.”

“There is little to tell, my child. The seizure took place in the night—some paralysis of the muscles of the heart—and he was past hope before I saw him. I telegraphed for you on my way here, and I have not left the house since; but in four hours all was over. There was no pain—not even such mental pain as he must have suffered, missing you from his side. He was spared all sense of parting, for he was totally insensible from the time of the seizure to the moment of his death.”

Dr. Talbot had hoped to see tears in the dark eyes turned expectantly upon him; but Gwendolyn could not and did not cry. She was too much stunned to realize her loss; she knew, without understanding, that her father was dead.

Gwendolyn Maltby was an only child, and had no recollection of the mother who had died in her infancy. The girl had grown up alone with her father in the great manor-house; and at the age of seventeen she had dismissed her last governess, and assumed the entire government of herself and of the household. She was a gentle and yet a high-spirited girl, fond of gaiety and excitement, and accustomed to have her own way in all things. She rode after the hounds; she attended all the balls in the county, where she was generally the belle and the star; she filled Wylmington Manor with guests,

and reigned there like a young sovereign, too beautiful and too winning not to carry all before her. She was spoilt and petted by the world, courted and flattered wherever she went, and idolized by the father, who saw in her the very image of the fair young wife he had loved so well and lost so early. At two and twenty Gwendolyn had had adulation and freedom enough to last a lifetime, and had never faced a single trouble nor known an ungratified wish.

It was not the best kind of training for a young girl—one who was heir to great wealth, and needed all the guidance that a parent's hand could give, as well as all the authority of a parent's voice, to teach the lessons of obedience and self-control, which cannot be inculcated too young. Gwendolyn had never been required to submit to any will other than her own. Her father never crossed her; and even had he done so, she would hardly have been aware of it, for her strong love for him would have taught her submission—the unconscious submission of affection. She was generous and high-principled, so that with all her liberty she had not grown selfish or hard, nor even vain and frivolous in spite of the flattery and gaiety to which she had been accustomed. But she had been as closely shielded as a human being can be from trouble or sorrow of any kind; and now that a great grief had fallen at last upon her, she was utterly stunned and bewildered.

Seeing that this was the case, Dr. Talbot tried to rouse her by questions.

"Your father's relatives must be informed of this event, my dear; and you must have some relatives about you at this crisis, for there will be much to think of and arrange. Who are the people who ought to be summoned? I know your father was very much alone in the world."

"There is only my mother's sister, Lady Allardice, who married Sir Frederic," answered Gwendolyn passively. "I do not know them well, but I saw them that spring when papa and I stayed a few weeks in London. They were to have come here in January—this month. I suppose they must be told."

"Certainly, at once. They will be sure to come. I think Lady Allardice is your only near relation?"

"I think so."

"Shall I write for you, Gwendolyn? The post will soon be going, and we must not lose it."

"I will not trouble you—thank you," answered the girl, rising quietly and crossing over to her dainty, inlaid davenport—her father's gift, as were all her most valuable possessions. She selected pen and paper with a curiously absent manner, and wrote a short note:—

"WILMINGTON MANOR, *January 4th.*

"DEAR AUNT ALLARDICE,—My father died suddenly this morning. Dr. Talbot says I must let you know at once, as I ought not to be alone. I don't exactly know why. Can you and Uncle Allardice come?—Your affectionate niece,

"GWENDOLYN MALTBY."

This note was sealed and despatched ; and then came an urgent summons for Dr. Talbot, which he could not but obey.

He was reluctant to leave Gwendolyn ; but she was relieved to see him go. She liked and respected Dr. Talbot, but he was not congenial to her in her present mood, and she felt a satisfaction in finding herself alone. She did not like to be watched or controlled, and the doctor seemed inclined to exercise a greater authority over her than she cared to submit to, although in the first overwhelming bewilderment of her grief she had permitted it.

Left alone in her pretty room, Gwendolyn sat down to think. She knew that some great change had befallen her, but what it was she hardly knew as yet. Death had only been a name to her so far. Now she was to realize its solemn reality.

What was this strange change that had come to her father—the father whom she had loved with a love that was deep and strong, though perhaps not as absorbingly so as she had always believed ?

He was dead. Somewhere upstairs he was lying cold, and stiff, and motionless. Gwendolyn shivered at the thought, and drew nearer to the ruddy blaze upon the hearth. Was it possible that she would never hear again the soft, caressing voice ? Would his lips never smile again at the sight of her ?—the haughty, handsome face never again soften into loving admiration as his eyes followed her movements, and his ears took in the sound of her voice and laughter ?

Very slowly the tears gathered in Gwendolyn's eyes, and a hearty, wholesome fit of weeping put an end to her sad, retrospective meditations.

Her nurse, an old servant who had had the care of Gwendolyn's childhood, and had never left her service, was in the room now, kneeling beside her young mistress, kissing and crying over her, and giving her the loving care and petting to which the girl had all her life been used.

Gwendolyn's sobs soon subsided, and she let her nurse remove her hat and force food and drink upon her. She was weary and faint from excitement and fatigue; and when she had taken her tea, and been coaxed into partaking of some daintily-prepared dish, her strength revived, and she was able to talk collectedly again, and to ask once more for the history of her father's last hours.

"I'm as sure as human soul can be that the poor master had had some warning that his end was near. 'Twas on Saturday last—New-Year's day, you know, dearie—that he sent for me and gave me a glass of wine to drink my young lady's health;—you know his friendly fashion. And then he talked to me quite serious-like, more religious than ever I've heard before; and it gave me a turn to hear him, it did, because he'd never talked in that fashion before. And then he gave me a parcel that felt like a book, wrapped up, and addressed to you, Miss Gwendolyn. And he bid me put it in your room, for you to find when you came home. 'It's a New-Year's gift, nurse,' he said; 'she's

never had one quite like it before from me.' And it's in your room now, dearie. I didn't like his doing it in that fashion; I felt that it wasn't quite natural-like. But I just did as I was bid, and put it there. Isn't it strange, now, that when you get it he should be dead and gone? Shall I bring it down to you?"

"No, thank you," answered Gwendolyn steadily; "I will go up. It is six o'clock, and I am very tired. I shall not want any dinner to-night. Tell Withers so. I will go to my room and see the parcel there."

Slowly the girl rose and went languidly on her way, through the spacious hall and up the wide, softly carpeted stairs. She hardly knew whether or not it was a dream, this strange, silent home-coming; and she hardly recognized herself as she passed the great mirror in the corridor. That pale, set face could hardly belong to the gay and happy Gwendolyn Maltby of yesterday.

At one door in the lobby she paused and hesitated, and her hand trembled as she half stretched it out towards the lock of the door. But the nurse, who had followed her closely, seemed to divine the half-formed purpose, and interposed hastily:—

"Not to-night, dearie—no, no, not to-night, my lamb. You're not fit. You shall see him to-morrow; and it will comfort you, maybe, to see how calm and still he lies, and how peaceful he looks. But come away now to your room. You have borne enough to-day. Come, Miss Gwendolyn, love, come."

Gwendolyn obeyed this half command, half entreaty,

and passed the door, with bent head, and hands that were closely locked together. She felt it was almost more than she could bear that night to look upon the face of her dead father.

She reached her own room, which was as warm and luxurious a place as wealth and taste could make it, and there she sank down upon a cushioned chair beside the fire and buried her face in her hands. She was trying hard to realize what it would be like to be quite alone in the world,—nobody's first care, nobody's first love—only an orphan girl of two and twenty, without brother, without sister, without any near relative whom she had ever known with any degree of intimacy. The prospect looked very dark and very dreary, and as yet no light had penetrated the gloom.

"You can leave me now for a little while, nurse," said Gwendolyn; "I want to be alone."

Something in the tone forbade that it should be gained. The nurse prepared to depart; but before doing so she laid upon a little table, close to her young mistress, a parcel carefully wrapped in soft paper, and said,—

"That was your papa's New-Year's gift, Miss Gwendolyn."



## CHAPTER II.

### A FATHER'S GIFT.

WHEN left alone in the solitude of her own room, Gwendolyn sat very still, experiencing, for the first time in her shielded, guarded life, that sense of cold desolation which must ever fall upon those who have lost by death the parent and protector of their youth, and have for the first time to face life and its cares and responsibilities alone.

"I can't understand it," said the girl half aloud; "what is it that has happened? Papa cannot really be dead; he cannot have left me all alone in the wide world—he who loved me so that he could hardly bear me out of his sight! Oh no, he can never have gone away and left me altogether."

But though Gwendolyn struggled hard against conviction, she knew that it was as she had said,—her father was dead, and she was alone.

Desolate as she was she shed no tears. There was an indignation in her heart which took away all the softness from her grief, and made her feel cold and hard and aggrieved.

Providence, she thought, had dealt very hardly with her in thus robbing her of her only parent whilst she was still young and in need of her natural protectors.

"I had only him," she said rebelliously. "I have no brother, no mother, nobody who really belongs to me. They say God is good ; but he has not been good to me. He might have spared me my father. Why should he have made him die ?"

Bitter thoughts were rising in her heart, and bitter words found their way to her tongue. She paced the room restlessly, like one ill at ease and tossed about by conflicting emotions.

"Papa was not religious—at least I don't think he was. He never spoke to me about religion, and he did not often come to church, or do the things religious people do ; but he was very good, and I loved him dearly. And there is no use my trying to be better than he was ; I couldn't be if I tried, and what is more, I don't wish to try."

Gwendolyn threw back her head proudly, in all the defiance of a youthful, untried nature, which thinks it can stand alone, and needs no help or guidance from above. The girl in her folly, her pride, her independence, felt strong enough at that moment to live without God and without religion.

As she so stood her eye fell upon the paper parcel, which lay upon the little table just where her nurse had left it.

Her face softened as she saw this—the last gift she could ever receive from her father, save the testamentary

bequests she could not even bear to think of in her present mood. She hated the thought that she was now absolute mistress of Wylmington.

She sat down and took the parcel in her hands. It bore this superscription, in the well-known hand she would never see again,—

“To my daughter Gwendolyn. Her father's New-Year's gift.”

The tears rose in Gwendolyn's eyes as she read these words. The new year had hardly commenced, and yet the fingers which had penned these words, only a few days ago, were stiff and powerless now, frozen in the icy sleep of death. That thought fell heavy on her heart as lead, and seemed to dry up the tears, which did not fall.

With slow, deliberate movements she unfastened the string, and took from its many wrappings the large and beautiful book it contained.

It was a volume bound in dark crimson Russia leather, with rims and clasps of solid silver, on which Gwendolyn's arms and monogram were engraved. Always lavish where his daughter was concerned, it seemed as if on this occasion Mr. Maltby had taken especial pains that his gift should be as rich and beautiful as wealth and skill could make it. So magnificent a book the girl had certainly never seen before.

What was the book upon which so much thought and wealth had been expended? A glance at its back would have told; yet Gwendolyn did not turn to look, only gazed with abstracted attention upon the volume

in her hands, and by the expression of her face it would almost seem as if she had no wish to make any more close examination of her magnificent present.

At length, as with reluctant fingers, she undid the clasps and lifted the outside cover. Upon the white watered silk within lay a letter in her father's hand—a letter not folded, but lying open just inside the book, as he had placed it himself. She took it out reverently, and for a moment laid it aside whilst she slowly turned to the fly-leaf. It merely contained these words,—“Gwendolyn Maltby. The gift of her father,”—followed by the date.

Turning this leaf she came to the title-page, and there read the words, in black and red Old English capitals, which she had expected and yet half feared to see,—“Holy Bible.”

When she had settled this point without a doubt, she laid the book upon the table once more and took up her father's letter.

It was dated “New-Year's Eve,” and was couched in the following terms:—

“MY DEAREST GWENDOLYN,—Another year is drawing to a close, and for the first time in your life, I think, we are not together to watch the old one out and the new one in. When you lay a little infant in your cradle—a little child upon your bed—your father was always at your side as the bells pealed out through the frosty night, welcoming in the glad new year, and his first act was to bestow kisses and blessings

upon the little sleeping child — his precious wife's precious legacy ; the child in whom all his hopes now centred.

"When you grew up, dear girl, we watched the year in together, and your bright anticipations, your sunny smiles, your soft caresses, drove far away all gloomy thoughts or sad memories, and made life look as bright to me as it did to you. Care could not touch me when you were at my side. Sorrow seemed as if driven away by the sunshine of your presence.

"And now I am watching the new year in alone, and my child is far away. It is right that it should be so. You are visiting those who have some right to claim you, and I have approved your absence from me at this time. Perhaps it is even well you should be far away, for it gives me time to mature certain thoughts which have for some while been stirring somewhat strangely within me.

"Yes, the old year is passing swiftly away, and in looking back strange feelings are rising within me. In looking forward, I cannot but wish that this new year, which is almost dawning, may be differently spent, in some points, from those which have before passed over us.

"Gwendolyn, my child, there are certain ways in which I feel I have not acted rightly towards you — in which I have not played a true father's part. I have neglected in your education certain important matters which never should have been neglected, and I have not taken the care I should that others filled the gap I left.

"Do you know to what I refer? I refer to a point upon which I find it easier to write than to speak. The reserve of a lifetime is not cast aside easily, and therefore I now write you a letter, where other fathers might speak face to face.

"Do you know much of my past history? I think not. I have not cared to speak much of it; but I will sketch it for you now, for that will best help you to understand what I am now wishful that you should comprehend.

"I was an only son—an only child. Like you I was born at the manor-house where you have always lived; and like you I was orphaned of one parent before I was many years old. I lost my father before I was four; and my mother was my guardian and the manager of the property until I came of age, and had undisputed authority over everything. Your grandmother was a good woman, Gwendolyn, but a hard one; and I feared her almost more than I loved her. She was what is called a very religious woman; and she early instilled into my mind a horror of the future world which I can hardly make comprehensible to you. God was in my eyes so terrible a being, that it almost seemed to my childish mind preferable to be shut out from his presence in everlasting darkness, than enter a place where he would be an all-pervading presence. I will not dwell upon this, for the remembrance of these boyish fears and thoughts is not a pleasant theme. Suffice it to say, Gwendolyn, that I was so overdone with religious instruction of a gloomy and fearful kind,

that I totally misunderstood its real nature, and determined that I would never have anything to do with a creed so melancholy and so hard. Mind, Gwendolyn, I know now that I was wrong in my beliefs. Like better men and more clever men than myself, I foundered upon a rock my own imagination had placed in my way. I believed that God was a cruel, relentless tyrant, who doomed millions of human souls to endless torment without giving them a chance to do better; and because I believed this I determined to have no more to do with him. I rejected him, and declined his service.

"I think my repudiation of religion half broke my mother's heart. I am sure it hastened her end. By the time I was one and twenty I was my own master in every sense of the word. My mother was dead, and my fortune, my estate, even as I told myself, my own soul, were mine to do with what I would.

"The next few years of my life I pass over, Gwendolyn, for I do not care to recall them. At the end of that time God, as if to show that he had not forgotten me, though I had forgotten him, sent to me an angel messenger in the likeness of your mother. For the first time in my life I loved deeply and passionately, and upon the day I married my fair young wife I vowed I would begin life anew.

"Your mother, my daughter, was a saint, if ever saint walked this earth. Her life was a lesson of pure and undefiled religion which I can never forget. If ever woman 'walked with God,' she did; and you know the epitaph upon her monument in the church,—no truer

words were ever graved on marble,—‘And they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.’

“Had she been spared to me, I think I should have been a very different man from the one I am. For the year and half-year we spent together I can never be sufficiently thankful; but the time was all too short. When you were a baby six months old your mother was taken from me, and in the bitterness of my grief my soul revolted against the God who had desolated my home.

“My wife had taught me to think of God as a Father and Friend, rather than a relentless Judge. I had begun to love him in a blind and feeble fashion, and to bless him for the goodness that he had shown in giving me my wife. But all this was changed now. My heart was turned to stone, and I shut out from it all the light which had dimly begun to penetrate into its dark recesses.

“This frame of mind continued long, but it did not last for ever. I found I *could* not utterly hate One whom your mother had so loved and trusted. I tried to shut my heart to softer feelings, but I could not quite succeed. I cannot say I learned to love God, but at least I did not hate him.

“As you grew up, I had to face the question, ‘How is my child to be taught? What is she to learn of these deep things of the other world?’ I put off the question as long as I could, and then, to speak the truth, I shirked it. I said to myself, ‘She shall learn as much or as little as her governesses and instructors choose to tell her.



As for me, I will say nothing, for I know not what to say.' I could not forget what I had suffered in my youth from the over-zeal of my mother. I knew well how youth wraps itself in a mantle of reserve—how it shrinks with real pain and terror when even a kindly hand attempts to tear away the cloak and see what lies beneath. When the right moment comes the cloak will be laid aside, and confidence given voluntarily, counsel and advice asked; but until that moment comes, no good can result from trying to force a way to confidence. No; it only shuts and locks for ever the natural outlet by which at length the soul will step forth uninvited, and give of its own accord what has only been withheld until the fitting time should come.

"This, my child, was my belief and my purpose; and I have held to it without wavering. I have never spoken one word of religion to you since your birth, and I know only from others that you say prayers and read God's Word. I know no more of your soul than you do of mine; but of late I have, had an idea that you are beginning to wish to hold some communication with your father upon the sacred and holy subjects which have not been touched upon between us hitherto.

"I write you this letter now, my child, to encourage you to give me your confidence, and, if indeed you wish to do so, to pave the way for you by telling you of my past history, and explaining, as I might have found it hard to do in words, what has been my experience of life.

"My child, be sure that you will have my sympathy in doubt, my comprehension in difficulty, my love in every word you utter. I have doubted, I have feared, I have hoped. Doubts, hopes, fears perplex and trouble me still; but of late the light has grown more clear around me, and at times I feel as if the peace of God were at length overshadowing me.

"My child, the new year is almost here. I cannot but pray that it may be a new year of peace and happiness to us both. My gift to you is God's Holy Word, the first Bible I have ever given away. I have studied it of late with a satisfaction I once could not have thought possible. I have found in its pages comfort and consolation beyond all I had ever dreamed. Study it for yourself, and see if it will bring to your young and unclouded spirit the same sense of rest and hope and joy which it has done to my sin-stained, world-weary soul. Study life's problems by the light of God's Word, by the Light of the world—even the man Jesus.

"This, Gwendolyn, is my New-Year's wish, my New-Year's blessing. God bless and keep you, my precious child.—Your ever most loving father,

"REGINALD MALTBY."

Gwendolyn read the long, closely-written letter through from end to end. In the light of recent circumstances it was even more solemn than it would have been at another time, and yet it seemed as if it hardly moved her.

Had her father been living, she would have wept freely at the loving words he had penned to her, and would have sought his presence instantly, to have kissed and cried over him, and been caressed and soothed by the quiet, loving words and gestures which he was always ready to bestow upon her. But now she sat mute and cold like one turned to stone, and no tears came to relieve her heart, which felt pressed down with unutterable woe.

She put the letter down upon the Bible, and gazed again into the fire, and gradually a look of purpose stole into her face.

She rose slowly and silently and crossed the room. At the door she hesitated, but only for a moment. Then she opened it and passed out into the corridor, which she traversed to its extreme length.

A door was at the end, and barred her further progress. A light was burning in the room and shone beneath the door.

With hands that trembled in the act, Gwendolyn opened that door, and slowly advanced into the room, which was lighted by four tall wax tapers.

She passed round the screen which shut off the bed from the door, and, in the deep silence that reigned there, stood in the presence of the quiet dead.

Motionless and rigid lay the corpse under the snowy drapery, which accentuated rather than concealed the rigid lines which death always assumes.

Gwendolyn's heart beat thick and fast as she turned back the sheet and gazed upon the well-known face,

now wearing the ineffable peace and majesty of the sleep which awaits God's wakening.

Very noble, very peaceful, very beautiful was that dead face. It quieted the girl's tempestuous feelings to gaze at its serene outline, and see a peace and satisfaction sealed upon it which in life it had never worn. It was as if God himself had laid his hand upon the honoured head and had said, "Well done...enter into the joy of thy Lord." Some divine benediction must surely have been bestowed before such peace could have fallen upon one who was quitting time for the boundless region of eternity.

Gwendolyn stole away at last, awed and yet strangely comforted.

She slept that night the heavy sleep of sorrow, and awoke the following morning with a strange sense of lonely helplessness. She sent her nurse to the nearest town for some mourning garments, and remained shut up in her own room, too much stunned and bewildered to feel lonely. Lady Allardice telegraphed early in the day that she and Sir Frederic would be with her by five o'clock, and there seemed no need for her to think about anything.

Her father's letter was dreamily perused and re-perused, and Gwendolyn kept repeating to herself,—

"I want to be good. I want to be good. Oh, who can help me? Where can I find help—comfort—peace?"

A little manual of devotion lay upon her table, and she opened it at once, half absently, half longingly. These words caught her eye:—

"If thy burden of sin be heavy, and thou sorely needest rest, help, forgiveness, and blessed assurance of peace, take it to the foot of the Cross, where thy Lord shall meet thee; and he will bless, pardon, and relieve thee."

"Ah," breathed Gwendolyn, "the foot of the Cross! But who will show me the way?"

## CHAPTER III.

### NEW RELATIONS.

WITH an anxious face and a beating heart Gwendolyn awaited in the great drawing-room the arrival of her relatives and guests.

The soft chimes of the clock upon the chimney-piece had rung out the hour of five, and every moment might bring the travellers to the house of mourning.

Gwendolyn stood leaning one elbow against the mantle-shelf, whilst she held in her hand a quaint Japanese screen to shield her face from the glow of the crackling wood-fire.

She looked tall and stately in her deep mourning, and the wide crape round neck and wrists showed off to advantage the peculiar delicate fairness of the girl's complexion, which almost resembled wax-work in its exquisite purity.

Gwendolyn had inherited a dower of good looks from both her parents, and had been "a beauty" from her babyhood upwards. The admiration she had received was certainly justified by appearances.

She had delicate, regular features, of the type which

seems to indicate noble and gentle descent—masses of soft, rippling hair of a deep gold colour, and a pair of great, dark eyes, peculiarly beautiful and expressive. The contrast presented by the delicate fairness of the complexion and hair with the dark eyes and long black lashes gave a peculiar character to the face, and quite redeemed it from the charge of insipidity which is sometimes, and not untruly, brought against countenances exhibiting peculiar blond beauty.

The expression of the face was less easy to read. Time and thought had as yet traced no lines upon its smooth surface. There were indications of power and will in the moulding of mouth and chin; but something in the restless, changing dark eyes seemed to indicate that as yet no settled line of thought or conduct had ever been entered upon.

Indulged and petted from the day of her birth, made into an absolute idol for the whole household when her mother's death took away all chance of another child to share the honours with her, it was small wonder if Gwendolyn had grown up governed more by caprice and love of pleasure than by sober judgment, more swayed by impulse than by reason; loving and lovable, it is true, but wanting in the stamina which no character can attain when brought up in the hot-house atmosphere of over-indulgence and incessant adulation.

It was much in the girl's favour that she was what she was—gentle, generous, and affectionate. Many would have been ruined in disposition by the training she had received; but Gwendolyn was not ruined. She was in-

clined to be wayward, it is true, but neither overbearing nor selfish in her waywardness. Her moods were changeable as April skies (how could it be otherwise when she had always been so humoured and indulged?); but she was quite aware that it was so, and would laugh at herself, and let others laugh, at the contradictory wishes and feelings to which she would give utterance almost in the same breath. She had much of natural gaiety and lightness of heart, and yet a latent power of suffering of which as yet she was hardly aware. Her nature was in fact too noble to be long contented by the butterfly existence she had hitherto led; but as yet she had not found this out. All she knew was that she had, from time to time, longings and aspirations which nothing in her present life seemed able to satisfy.

She was thinking dreamily of these longings in connection with her father's death, and trying out of the chaos of her mind to get hold of one connected train of thought, when a sharp ring at the door-bell startled her effectually out of her reverie.

"They are come!" she said half aloud, and she advanced a few paces nearer to the door.

She had not to wait long. In two minutes the door opened swiftly and silently, and Gwendolyn was folded in the embrace of her aunt.

"My dear girl! my own poor darling! how glad I am to be with you at this time of sorrow! Why did they not telegraph yesterday? I would have flown! It is quite dreadful to think of your loneliness at such a terrible crisis. How have you borne up, poor darling?"



Gwendolyn clung somewhat to this aunt with a natural, girlish fondness for one who seemed so loving and so ready to grant the protection and care she craved; but no tears rose to her eyes, and she was able to speak quite steadily:—

“Dear aunt, I am so glad you have come! I am sure everything will be better now. It was dreadful to be all alone.”

“Poor child! yes, of course it was. You are not fit to have anything like that to bear. But your uncle and I will manage everything now. You shall have no trouble which we can spare you.”

Sir Frederic Allardice had now entered—a tall handsome man, with a fine sonorous voice and a commanding presence. He embraced his niece with a paternal affection, and evidently considered it his part to try to cheer up the afflicted girl by diverting her mind from the one thought which must naturally stand foremost.

“Why, Gwendolyn, how you have grown and improved!” he exclaimed, as he stood with his back to the fire, surveying her with a cordial admiration. “You were pretty enough three years ago, to be sure; but you were a mere slip of a girl then; and now you have developed into a magnificent woman.—Won’t she make a sensation in town, mamma?” he asked, appealing to his wife in a playful, colloquial way. “Won’t she turn some heads when we get her there?”

“Yes, yes, Frederic; there is no doubt about that. But we must not overdo the dear girl with admiration now. She would rather be left in peace, I am sure.

She will find out her good looks fast enough, you may be sure."

Tea was brought in at this moment, and Gwendolyn sat down behind the silver tray to attend to her duties as hostess.

Her aunt took a chair very near her, and gave her many glances of sympathetic interest.

Lady Allardice was not so tall as her niece, nor so handsome, but she passed for a good-looking woman in her own circle. She had studied the art of dress, and her own was always perfection, and also set off to perfection every grace and every charm of which she was possessed. Her manner was as irreproachable as her costume. She had the unerring tact of a woman of the world, and could produce upon others almost any impression which she desired. Time sometimes caused first impressions to fade, and there were people who liked Lady Allardice less on close acquaintance than they had done at first sight; but on the whole she held her own admirably in the regard of those about her, and was looked upon as a very clever and amiable woman.

"Dear child," she said, drawing yet nearer to Gwendolyn, whilst Sir Frederic walked about the room, cup in hand, examining the costly pictures and rare china which adorned it,—“dear child, if it does not pain you to speak of it, can you tell me a few details of your dear father's death? It has all been so shockingly sudden that I feel it hard to realize that he has been taken."

"So do I," answered Gwendolyn quietly; "I think it will be a long while before I do realize it. Indeed, Aunt Allardice, I know almost nothing myself. I was away on a visit, and got back only last evening in answer to a telegram. He had been dead a long while then. Dr. Talbot could do nothing. It was syncope, he said; the heart was affected in some way. He was found unconscious in the morning, and died in a few hours."

"Dear, dear! how terribly sudden and sad. My poor child, you have borne up heroically under the crushing blow. I cannot be thankful enough for it. Such fortitude is not granted to every one in misfortune. Your dear father had just such a character—composed and calm under most crushing affliction. I see that you resemble him, dear Gwendolyn."

"I feel so cold and hard sometimes," said the girl slowly, "almost as though I had no heart. I thought I must be unfeeling."

"Poor dear girl, poor darling! did you think that? No, my sweet Gwendolyn, I will not have you trouble yourself with thoughts like these. One knows so well the numb feeling that creeps over us under a deep affliction, seeming for a time to deaden grief itself. But it is no indifference, it is not coldness; rather is it an intensity of sorrow too great to be fully comprehended. I, who have lost two sweet children and one beloved sister, can enter well into your feelings, and give you a true and comprehending sympathy."

Gwendolyn felt relieved and somewhat comforted.

"I am glad you understand. I am glad you do not think me heartless. Indeed—indeed I did love papa; but now I do not feel as if I could even cry;" and Gwendolyn wondered how it was that her aunt's kindness did not unseal the fountain of her tears.

"Never mind, darling; tears will come in time to relieve you, and no one here will misunderstand your calm. These next days must necessarily be very sad and trying ones for you. You must rally all your courage to meet them."

"I will, dear aunt."

"That is my brave girl. We will spare you as far as is possible, your uncle and I. That you know without any assurance."

"You are very good," said Gwendolyn gratefully. "You don't know how helpless I feel."

"Poor child!" Lady Allardice bent forward and kissed her on brow and cheek. "Your dear father spared you every kind of trouble, did he not?"

"Oh yes; I never knew the meaning of the word till now. But, dear aunt, you must be tired after your journey. Let me show you your room. We dine at half-past seven. You will like to rest till then, I am sure."

"If you will come with me, dear child; but I feel as if I could not let you out of my sight."

Gwendolyn, unused to solitude, and well used to caresses, followed her aunt contentedly, and was much soothed during the following hours by the petting and tenderness lavished upon her.

Lady Allardice's love was so unlike her father's, so much more demonstrative and free in its expression, that it roused no painful memories in her mind, seeming more like the outspoken fondness of her nurse than the deep, silent tenderness of her dead father.

But to one accustomed always to lean, to one who had never been taught self-reliance or forethought, it was an immense boon to have such people in the house as Sir Frederic and Lady Allardice, and before the first evening had passed, Gwendolyn saw with a feeling of relief that all further anxiety and trouble would be efficiently taken off her hands.

At the close of this same evening, as the clock chimed the hour of ten, Lady Allardice looked at her niece and said;—

"You seem very weary, dear child, and look more fit for your bed than for any other place. What time do you have family prayers? I suppose you would like your uncle to conduct them this evening, would you not?"

Gwendolyn blushed and hesitated, and then said,—

"We never have had family prayer, Aunt Allardice. I—I—I don't think papa cared about it."

"Ah yes. I remember your dear father held peculiar views upon religious subjects. It was a pity—a sad pity. A man with heterodox views closes against himself such a field of usefulness, and deprives his dependants of an example of which they greatly stand in need in these days. But if I might suggest, dear girl, considering the solemn event which has just fallen upon this household, do you not think it would be well and

in good taste to assemble the servants and ask a blessing upon all under this roof before we separate for the night?"

"Oh yes!" assented Gwendolyn eagerly, touched and surprised by the thought, the feelings of the earlier hours of the day rising up strongly within her. "I should like to have prayers very much, and I am sure papa would wish it. Where shall we go?"

"Your uncle will arrange that with the butler. The hall, I should think, would be as good a place as any." And when Sir Frederic had quitted the room, Lady Allardice continued in her quiet, explanatory fashion to Gwendolyn, who was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to heed very much what her aunt said,— "You see, my dear, in these days of dissent and radicalism (I always associate the two in my mind together, for they are closely connected) I and your uncle consider it of great importance to uphold the doctrines of the Established Church, and to show in private and public life that we do so. Of course it is not always easy, or even possible, to do quite as one would wish on such matters; but unless it is really inconvenient, we hold it well to keep up the old custom of assembling the household once a day for family prayer. I am convinced that when you have seen more of life you will agree with me in what I say."

Gwendolyn had been in a reverie most of this time; but she heard the last words, and looked up with a smile which showed traces of a good deal of feeling.

"Dear aunt, I do agree with you. I think it is a beautiful idea. I am sure if papa had lived a little

longer he would have said just what you do. His ideas were changing at the last. I am sure of it."

"I am rejoiced indeed to hear you say so. It is a sad thing when a man leaves the beaten path to wander in trackless darkness."

Gwendolyn's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"It was light at the last, I am sure of that," she said softly.

Sir Frederic read prayers in the hall, where his fine voice was heard to great advantage.

Gwendolyn knelt with covered face and a beating heart, listening to familiar prayer-book petitions, and feeling a new solemnity and beauty in the spirit-stirring words. A great hope and a great joy were welling up in her heart. Her aunt, whom she had believed so "worldly," was in reality a good religious woman, and from her she would learn that peace and consolation of which her father had spoken, and which she too would fain understand; she would no longer have to feel her own way through the darkness. With a feeling of reverent joy, mingled with no little solemnity and awe, Gwendolyn slowly rose to her feet, and saw the long train of servants vanishing through their own door.

Surely her aunt would speak now, would bestow upon her some motherly words of comfort and blessing. Surely one of those two would lovingly commit the desolate orphan to the care of the Father of the fatherless. Yes, her aunt was already speaking to her.

"Gwendolyn, my dear, do you know that your mourning is much too deep? Fashion has changed of

late on that point; and a good thing too. That dress is more suitable to a widow than to you. I can see by the cut that it never came from London. I suppose down here they do not understand such things."

The light of reverent hope died slowly out from Gwendolyn's face. No disappointment appeared there, only a sort of listless indifference.

"I have written to White's. Nurse bought this dress to-day in Farnley. I must make it do till my real mourning comes. I could not bear to have nothing suitable to put on. I'm afraid I forgot to explain why I could not dress for dinner."

"Ah! I am glad you go to White's. You are sure to get good style there. Now, dearest, I am going to see you safely to bed; you look weighed down by fatigue, and I must take care of you now, for I quite look upon you as my child."

To poor Gwendolyn, in her lonely helplessness, this protecting care was very grateful. She slept well that night, and was fortified by her rest to hear upon the morrow some news which startled yet hardly displeased her. Lady Allardice told her quietly, yet firmly, that she would be obliged for the present to leave her old home, which she could not inhabit alone and unprotected, although she was heiress of Wylmington and of a large fortune as well. But this piece of news was coupled with so warm an invitation for Gwendolyn to make her home with her aunt and uncle in London, that the girl was almost glad to feel that she could close one page of her life, which was haunted by such sad memories, and



reopen it at a new place, where the freshness of all around must be pleasant and cheerful. Her old home would still be hers. Some day she would come back to it and live there as of old, with the old servants to wait upon her, who would be retained as pensioners and remain on at Wylmington to take care of the house.

Meantime a life of change in London would be very pleasant in many ways; and Gwendolyn was eager to hear about her cousins Bernard, Cynthia, and Cicely, of whose doings as days fled by she learned more and more, and speculated a good deal as to whether or not she should find them congenial companions.

But the train of thought suggested by her father's letter never ceased to haunt her with more or less persistency, and her desire to learn "how to be good" was still very strong.

One day she opened the subject with her aunt, whom she believed, from several hints dropped, to be a "religious woman."

"Aunt Allardice, you do think religion is of great importance, do you not?"

"My dear child, yes, of the first importance. I consider the socialistic, atheistic tendency of the day most serious. It all shows a levelling spirit which cannot be too greatly deplored. Religious views are of the highest value, and I am very particular in advocating them. I never admit to my service any one who is not a member of the Established Church; and I always take care that my young servants are confirmed, and encourage them to be regular communicants."

"Aunt Allardice," said Gwendolyn slowly, "I have never been confirmed."

"Not confirmed! My dear child, you shock me! But the fault is not yours. Your poor father's views were so peculiar, no doubt he never gave the matter a thought. I am afraid my neglect is more in fault than anything else. As your god-mother I ought to have thought of all that; but really it never entered my head that such an omission was possible."

"Am I too old now?" asked Gwendolyn wistfully. Her heart was hungry for some satisfaction which she believed that religion could give, and she wondered if confirmation would bring with it the sense of peace for which she craved.

"No, certainly not; there is no limit to age. You shall certainly be confirmed in the spring. It is a pity it was not done before; people will think it so peculiar. But we need not talk about it. You shall not join any regular class. Mr. Carlingford shall prepare you privately. There need be no talk about it before people."

"Is there anything to be ashamed of in being confirmed?" asked Gwendolyn wonderingly.

"Oh no, dear child, certainly not; merely it seems a little odd that a girl in your position should not have been made a professed member of the Church at the usual age. It is better that all the world should not be made aware of your poor, dear father's views upon such matters."

Sudden tears rose to Gwendolyn's eyes. Her father had that day been laid in his last, lowly resting-place;

and the morrow would see her far away from her old home and familiar surroundings. Her heart was full of conflicting emotions, and she could not bear to hear one word of reflection against one whom she had so truly loved.

"Aunt Allardice, indeed you are wrong. Papa died so happy—I saw it in his face—and he did not hold those—those views to the end. He did change. He would have taught me if he had only lived. Oh, why did he die just then?"

"Dearest child, you must not excite yourself. We must always resign ourselves to God's will."

Gwendolyn's tears fell fast. She answered humbly,—

"I do try, Aunt Allardice, indeed I do; but it is so hard. You will help me to be good, won't you, please, and to love God as I ought?"

"Certainly, dearest girl, I will do all I can; and when you are confirmed, and made a member of the Church, you will feel much more happy and settled."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A TÊTE-A-TÊTE.

THE leaving Wylmington was like a dream to Gwendolyn. She never could recall exactly how she had quitted the old home, which had sheltered her for so many long years. Tears fell from many eyes as the carriage rolled away over the frosty ground, but Gwendolyn's were dry. Sobs, and blessings, and good wishes had been plentiful, but the girl's voice had been all but silent. She felt as if she could neither think, nor speak, nor feel, and when her aunt tried to hold and press her hand, in token of approval and sympathy, she had involuntarily shrunk away, as if any touch, however soft, gave pain.

But during the long railway journey she had time to recover herself, and the numb sensation of dismay and grief wore away, and the girl's thoughts instinctively turned towards the future, and busied themselves, idly rather than curiously, with the new life that was opening before her, and upon which she had just entered.

Wylmington Manor lay in the midlands, and it was growing dim and dusk before the lights of the great

metropolis shone through the gloom; and when the well-appointed carriage drew up before Sir Frederic's Grosvenor Square mansion, darkness had fallen upon the world, so that the light and warmth within were all the more striking by contrast.

"Welcome, dearest Gwendolyn, to your new home," said Lady Allardice, as she led the girl into the warm, well-lighted hall. There was sincerity in the tone, and Gwendolyn was able to smile and return the pressure of the delicately-gloved hand.

There was a rustle upon the staircase above them, and looking up, Gwendolyn beheld her handsome cousin Cynthia bearing down upon them in all the dignity of rich silk and flashing bugles.

"Dear Gwendolyn, how glad I am to see you!" said Cynthia, taking her two hands, and kissing her, French fashion, on each cheek. "How cold and tired you must be with your long journey this bitter weather. I have a lovely fire in your room, and some tea waiting there for you.—Mamma, I claim Gwendolyn for the next two hours. You have had your full share; and there is quite a stack of letters upon your davenport waiting for you. I will tell you all the news some other time. I am going to devote myself to Gwendolyn now."

"Do so, my own; only be careful not to excite her needlessly. Remember she has had a good deal to tax her strength of late," said Lady Allardice smiling.—"Gwendolyn, my dear, I leave you in good hands. Your cousin Cynthia rules us all."

Cynthia merely smiled, not exactly an assenting smile, and linked her arm within Gwendolyn's.

"Come," she said, "I will show you your room;" and when they were beyond ear-shot she added with an ironical inflection in her voice, "I think I know whose company is most likely to overtax you, when the choice lies between mine and mamma's."

Something in the tone made Gwendolyn say, she hardly knew why,—

"Your mother has been very kind to me."

"Mamma is a very kind woman," answered Cynthia with gravity. "She is kind to all deserving people."

Another flight of softly-carpeted steps was ascended, and then Cynthia paused and said,—

"This is your room, Gwendolyn; it is next door to mine, and there is a door between, which you can keep locked when you don't want to be intruded upon. I have left the key on your side of the door."

Gwendolyn smiled, and murmured something about not using it.

"I don't know," answered Cynthia, with a laugh not altogether unlike that of her mother. "Do not make rash promises. Near neighbours do not always agree. Cicely had the room once; but we found out that it did not answer. Sisters do not always like such close quarters."

The room was a large square apartment, handsomely furnished, and lighted by many wax candles and by a blazing fire. There were two large windows, now closely curtained, which Cynthia told her looked upon

the square. The roll of carriages in the street below struck unfamiliarly upon her ears.

A little three-legged table was drawn up to the fire, with a *tête-à-tête* tea laid out upon it; and Cynthia, relieving her cousin of her hat and furs, pushed her gently into a deeply-cushioned chair, and bid her warm and rest and refresh herself.

"You look fagged to death—pale and heavy-eyed and interesting. Here is a cup of tea; that will be the best thing for you. Don't bother to talk or answer. Sip your tea and make yourself comfortable. I want to take stock of you, and you shall have the result of my meditations later."

Gwendolyn smiled languidly, and obeyed the injunctions of her cousin willingly enough. The strong fragrant tea was very refreshing, the glowing warmth of the fire very comforting. Her chair was luxury itself; and Cynthia was so completely at her ease, that she put her guest at ease before five minutes had passed.

Hyacinth Allardice at three and twenty was a very handsome woman, who was much admired in her social circle, not simply for her stately beauty, but for the nameless "style" peculiarly her own.

Her hair was of a deep, dark brown, which she wore piled up on her head in a crown of thick plaits. Over her forehead it lay in dusky waves, and gave a peculiar grace to the outline of the broad, low brow. Her features were clearly cut, slightly aquiline, but not markedly so; her skin was a clear, pale olive, without a tinge of colour, and there was a brown stain under the

eyes which gave them a peculiar luminous brightness. These same eyes were almost too large for the rather small, oval face, and their colour was a deep, intense blue, which looked in shadow almost black. Very long black lashes and perfectly arched eyebrows gave additional emphasis to the eyes, and made them a very marked feature.

Cynthia was looking fixedly at Gwendolyn, and when the latter had swallowed her tea, and grown warm and refreshed, she looked up and met the steady gaze with a smile.

"Well, Cynthia?"

"I am taking stock," answered Cynthia quietly. "Are you nervous?"

"Not at all."

"Do you want to know the result of my meditations?"

"At your leisure."

Cynthia leaned forward and replenished her companion's cup, and then she said calmly,—

"You are very beautiful; but I suppose that is no news to you."

Gwendolyn smiled a little sadly, and said,—

"Papa used to think so, I know; but I have not been a great deal into society—not into what you would call society, Cynthia."

"Town mouse and country mouse," returned the other; "but I suppose even a country mouse has a modest appreciation of its own merits. Have you never made a serious study of your personal appearance, Gwendolyn?"



What is your own opinion of its claims to admiration or the reverse?"

Gwendolyn could not help smiling, although her answer did not seem forthcoming at once. Cynthia continued with great gravity,—

"I have had to study the subject, you see; for naturally I am not handsome—"

"O Cynthia!" Gwendolyn could not help exclaiming, as she glanced into the face opposite her.

"*Naturally* not handsome, I said," continued Cynthia unmoved; "and naturally I am not. I am altogether out of proportion—a tall figure, weedy and overgrown, and a very pale small face on the top of it, with a load of hair upon it almost too heavy for it to carry easily. I should have been a simple washed-out fright if I had not studied the subject. I have not your natural advantages, you see."

"I don't see anything yet," answered Gwendolyn with a smile of curiosity and amusement, "except that you are very good-looking and very elegant. I can't believe you paint, or powder, or pad, Cynthia, so I am at a loss to know why it is you are so severe upon yourself."

"No, I do not do that," said Cynthia slowly. "It is a great mistake. Paint and powder spoil the skin hopelessly, and you have to lay on more and more until every one can see that the bloom is artificial; and for a girl to paint is a great mistake. I shall take to it in later life in all probability; but nothing would induce me to do so now. What I allude to as artificial in my appearance is all legitimate—the lawful aid given by a

French dressmaker, and a careful study of effect by one's own mirror. Style is everything: if you have a style of your own, and one which suits you, you can set beauty at defiance, as it were. I have no real beauty, as you would say if you saw me with my hair down, and in an ordinary dressing-jacket; but I have style, and it is quite the fashion to admire me."

Gwendolyn took in this her first lesson in fashionable ideas with great gravity. She was not indifferent to the worldly wisdom of her companion, and her curiosity was piqued by Cynthia's manner.

"Well," she said by-and-by with a smile, "am I to learn from this lecture that you have style and not beauty, and I beauty but not style?"

Cynthia smiled a little.

"I had not quite said or implied so much; but now that you put the thought into words, I am not sure that I shall contradict you."

Gwendolyn roused herself to say, still smiling,—

"Aunt Allardice approved of my mourning; and I thought it a little *too* stylish."

"Ah, yes; mamma does not understand these things. White's style leaves nothing to be desired, I know; but that is not *your* style, you know. If I am not afraid of you as a rival, I will indoctrinate you with some of my experiences."

"I am sure you need not be afraid of me," said Gwendolyn, looking with admiration at the elegant figure before her, with a sense of its superiority which seemed entirely to sink her own into insignificance.

"Whatever you like to say, I am sure I shall never look half so handsome as you do."

"I think we shall be foils for each other," said Cynthia reflectively. "I should like to be able to live peaceably and amicably with you, Gwendolyn; for my nature is not naturally reserved, and Cicely has little sympathy with me, or I with her."

"Your mother seems sympathetic," observed Gwendolyn; "she was very kind to me."

Cynthia's short upper lip curled a little with an expression somewhat sarcastic.

"Mamma seems a vast variety of things," she answered lightly; and then seeing her cousin did not catch her drift, she added, with her peculiar little laugh, "When you have lived longer in society, my dear, you will find that grown-up daughters do not make confidantes of their mothers."

"No?"

"No; it does not do in these modern days. It is a good old fashion which has quite gone out."

Gwendolyn's eyes looked grave and questioning.

"Are you a cynic, Cynthia?"

"I a cynic? Oh no, dear child!" answered Cynthia with a manner and voice so exactly like Lady Allardice's that Gwendolyn could not but smile. "It never does to be *outré* in any way; it stamps a girl as peculiar at once, and that is as good as a ban. Oh no; just a *soupçon* of cynicism perhaps just to flavour and give spice to conversation, just to suggest originality of mind. But a cynic—oh no!"

"Cynthia," said Gwendolyn, recovering her gravity, "you ought not to mimic your mother."

Cynthia lifted her delicate eyebrows with an expression of profound innocence.

"Why, Gwendolyn, what better pattern can a girl find than her own mother?"

Gwendolyn shook her head warningly.

"You know what I mean, and what you mean. Cynthia, why is it?—or am I wrong?—I can't help fancying you do not like your mother."

"Really, my fair cousin, you leap to conclusions with alarming rapidity. You have not been an hour in the house, and here you are accusing me of the breach of the fifth commandment! I assure you, mamma and I are capital friends, and hold wonderfully similar views of men and things."

"I thought you did not sympathize with each other very much?"

"Sympathy, my dear Gwendolyn, is quite a different thing from opinion," answered Cynthia laughing. "On externals, mamma and I are beautifully in accord. When such is the case, it is never wise to disturb the blissful unanimity of soul by trying to penetrate beyond the surface."

Gwendolyn sat in silent meditation, and gradually a pensive wistfulness of expression stole over her fair, pale face.

"Papa and I always understood each other—at least he always understood me. I could say anything to him. We had no fears—no limit."

"Ah!" said Cynthia with apparent gaiety; and by-and-by she sighed, and said, "More Arcadian than natural."

"It seemed natural to us."

There was silence for a while, which Cynthia was the first to break:—

"I suppose you think me very unfeeling all this while, don't you?"

"No; why?"

"Because I don't talk to you about your loss, or your trouble, or anything like that; and don't kiss and cry over you, and call you a poor darling."

"I am very glad you don't," said Gwendolyn, with all sincerity. "I don't feel as if I wanted to talk or to think about the past yet. Perhaps in time I may, but not now."

"You are wise," answered Cynthia, whilst a curious, bitter look passed over her face. "It never does any good to dwell on the past, to mourn over trouble, or to cry over spilt milk. To smile and to jest whilst one's heart is aching to distraction is the way of the world, and a very wise way too. It is fatal to be sad. Even a widow is not allowed more than a gentle, almost sprightly resignation of manner; the heavy widow has quite gone out. For my part, I don't see why widows need be pitied. They have had their share of happiness, if they married for love, and should not complain; if it was a marriage of policy, they are well quit of their bargain," and Cynthia sighed heavily.

Gwendolyn was looking curiously at her.

"Cynthia," she said, "you look as if you had had some great trouble too."

The girl laughed mirthlessly.

"Life is not a bed of roses exactly; we all find that, do we not, when we pass our teens? I am not an exception to the general run. I have known disappointment and disillusionment."

"No *special* trouble?"

"Not more than most of my kind, I imagine."

Gwendolyn looked sympathetically at her, and said,—

"I wish I could help you."

Cynthia rose suddenly, came over, and kissed her.

"You are a dear girl, Gwendolyn. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you all. But there is the dressing-bell. We won't have Adèle to-night. We will help each other. I should like to dress you. Come, we must not be lazy any more. We can talk again to-night."

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE FIRST EVENING.

THE Allardices were without guests that evening, in consideration of their recent loss and the feelings of their niece.

When Gwendolyn found herself seated at the long table, the only strange face was that of her cousin Cicely, who had only been introduced to her hastily upon the stairs, just before they entered the dining-room. During the meal Gwendolyn had time to study the face opposite, and to wonder what kind of girl the cousin was.

Cicely was dressed in black of course ; but her black, unlike her sister's, was severely simple—velvet without any adornment, falling in straight folds about her slight figure, and showing to advantage its rounded contour.

Her hair was cut short, and clustered round her head in natural rings of a dusky brown colour. Her complexion was fairer than Cynthia's, though almost as pale, and her eyes were hazel, very bright and intelligent-looking. Her features were good and regular, yet Gwendolyn, at the first glance, did not think her pretty, for the still gravity of the face made its lines

too severe for beauty, and rendered its expression quite enigmatical.

All through the dinner-hour Cicely never opened her lips unless directly addressed, and then her answers were as brief as possible, and given in a low, grave voice, not unmusical, but strangely repressed in so young a woman. She hardly looked at Gwendolyn, and did not once address her, and the stranger felt puzzled to account for this silence. No one else seemed to observe it. It evidently was nothing unusual. It was taken by the rest as a matter of course. This seemed to Gwendolyn almost stranger still.

"I wish Bernard were at home," said Lady Allardice, looking at her niece. "He always makes the house more lively; but he will not be gone many days.—What took him away, Cynthia love?"

"Bertie Heron came for him, and they went away together. He said he would be away only three days, but he has been five already. Bernard never writes, so we have no means of learning his movements."

"He always was a naughty boy," said Lady Allardice, smiling and shaking her head.—"Gwendolyn, you will have to see what you can do to keep him in order."

"I, Aunt Allardice?"

"Yes; cousins sometimes succeed where mother and sisters have failed."

Cynthia looked quickly at her mother and then at Gwendolyn, but said nothing.

Sir Frederic observed that it was time for him to be off, as he was going down to the House.



This occasioned a general move, and the ladies trooped upstairs to the drawing-room.

Lady Allardice seated herself comfortably by the fire, and said that she really felt quite fatigued by all the bustle of the day. Under the soothing effect of Cynthia's music, she dropped asleep and slept soundly.

Cynthia had seated herself at the distant piano, and was playing dreamily and sweetly. Cicely had taken up a book; but seeing that Gwendolyn had not remained by the piano, but had come over to the fire, she leaned back in her chair and played with an ivory paper-knife, not speaking, but ready if necessary to enter into conversation.

Gwendolyn, after gazing awhile absently into the fire, sat down in the chair nearest to her cousin, and saw that her aunt was fast dropping off to slumber.

"Did you want to read?" asked Gwendolyn; "don't let me hinder you if you do. I like to listen to Cynthia, and I know you are very learned."

Cicely looked up and smiled suddenly. It was the first smile Gwendolyn had seen, and it certainly transfigured the face in a wonderful way. It made her quite pretty so long as the gleam lasted.

"Mamma told you that, I suppose. She told you I was a blue-stocking."

"Yes."

"What is a blue-stocking?"

"I thought it meant a learned lady."

"Then I am certainly not one."

"Are you not learned?"

"No; intensely ignorant. I have just learned enough to have a dim idea of my ghastly ignorance. That in a woman is quite sufficient to gain for her the reputation of deep learning."

Gwendolyn smiled and looked questioningly at Cicely, and said,—

"I suppose I am very ignorant; but I have never thought of it before."

"One doesn't think much about it till one begins to read and to think."

Gwendolyn pondered a little, and then said,—

"Your mother reads a great deal. She talked over such a lot of new books with the lawyer and Dr. Talbot and the clergyman at Wylmington. I had never even heard of most of them. Has reading so much made her learned, do you think?"

Cicely's face had put on its impassive gravity. All the answer she made was comprehended in three slowly-spoken words:—

"Mamma reads reviews."

Gwendolyn did not quite understand the bearing of this remark. She leaned over towards Cicely and looked at the book upon her knee.

"'Autobiography of John Stuart Mill,'" she read slowly, and looking up she asked, "Is it interesting?"

"Very."

Gwendolyn paused awhile in thought.

"Papa did not like me to read Mill's books."

"Why not?"

"He said they were too hard for me—that I could

not understand them ; but I always fancied he had some other reason besides."

Cicely smiled a little, but this time the smile was cold and sarcastic.

"Mamma does not like me to do so either ; but I prefer to judge for myself."

"Is there anything bad in the books ?" asked Gwendolyn in a low voice.

"Well, that of course is a matter of opinion. You know, I suppose, that his views were not exactly orthodox."

"Weren't they ?"

"Well, no, not altogether. His religion was what most people would call no religion at all. He was, in fact, an atheist."

"How dreadful !"

"Yes ; and so people are afraid to let young girls read his books, lest they should become tainted."

"But—but," began Gwendolyn, who felt half-shocked and half-frightened, and yet wholly fascinated by the subject, "you read him, and you—"

"Well ?"

"You are not tainted, are you ?"

"That rather depends upon what you call tainted. If it means liking and admiring and holding his views, I certainly do not do that. I think his creed is about the gloomiest thing I ever read. But sometimes," and here a bitter look crossed Cicely's face—"in fact, I think I may say plainly that I would ten thousand times rather have Mill's religion than mamma's."

"Cicely!" cried Gwendolyn, horrified and astonished, "what do you mean?"

The light had gone out of Cicely's face; she only said coldly and wearily,—

"Oh, nothing. Only I like people to be in earnest, even in religion."

Gwendolyn did not like to pursue the subject further, though it raised in her mind a host of surmises, doubts, and questions. The only one she felt able to ask was what follows,—

"Are you in earnest in religion, Cicely?"

"I should be, if I had found one that fully satisfied me."

"But—but you must have a religion," argued Gwendolyn, who felt as if the little ground she had gained by her aunt's sympathy and comprehension was slipping away from under her feet. "You belong to the Church of England, don't you?"

"Oh yes, of course I do; every one does nominally. If you mean going to church, and all that sort of thing, I am as religious as any one—the most religious person in the house, I think. I thought you were thinking of other things—real things."

Gwendolyn was not aware exactly of what she was thinking; but she knew that Cicely was talking of matters almost beyond her comprehension, and which distressed and puzzled her, she hardly knew why.

She was glad that Cynthia had left the piano and had come over to where they were sitting, kneeling upon the soft white rug, and stretching her slim jewelled hands to the ruddy blaze of the fire.

"What a cold night it is! How do poor people live in weather like this? I can't imagine.—You look grave, Gwendolyn; you and Cicely have been in earnest confabulation. Has she been puzzling you with any of her paradoxes and theories? You know she is the learned one of this benighted family."

"That is saying a great deal, is it not?" said Cicely, with the least possible curl of her still lips. "A high compliment!"

"We were talking," said Gwendolyn slowly, "about being religious."

"A profitable conversation indeed!" returned Cynthia with a smile whose meaning Gwendolyn could not fathom. "We are quite a religious family, you will find, fair cousin. Cicely teaches in a Sunday school, and has a district of dreadful dirty people, and would have been a night-school teacher, only dear mamma very properly thought that just a little *outré*—just a wee bit peculiar for a young lady of her rank and position, especially as it would interfere with the dinner-hour. I never was the useful one; for my part, my whole soul is given over to being ornamental. I attend church, and give them the benefit of my beautiful voice once a year at a concert, given by the *élite* of the congregation, for the benefit of the poor. Once I made them a lovely pulpit banner and offertory bags; but that was in a fit of religious fervour which is hardly likely to recur;" and here Cynthia's face looked all at once so hard and so bitter, that Gwendolyn wondered more than ever what trouble it could have been which had so evi-

dently fallen upon her and sowed seeds of evil in her heart.

Cicely seemed to divine the reason for the sudden pause in her sister's discourse, for she interposed to say,—

"I think the subject has become threadbare,—it doesn't stand close inspection; and besides, Bernard will be here in a minute."

"Bernard!"

"Yes; I heard him come in five minutes ago."

"What a good thing!" remarked Cynthia, rising slowly to her feet. "Now, perhaps, we shall have a little enlivenment."

Cicely was right in her surmise. The arrival she had heard announced no less a person than her brother Bernard, and in five minutes he made his entry into the drawing-room.

Lady Allardice, awakened by the noise, started up with a little cry of welcome:—

"My boy, my dearest boy! This is an unexpected pleasure. I am glad to see you again."

Bernard kissed his mother and sisters affectionately. He was a tall, stalwart youth, with a frank, open face well bronzed by sun and wind, curly fair hair, and features more remarkable for good-humour and candour than for any special symmetry which they possessed. He was not bad-looking, this Bernard Allardice; but he had none of the delicate chiselled contour or stately grace which characterized in various degrees his mother and sisters. He took after his father's family, and thought

it a much finer thing to be master of the hounds than Prime Minister. His father had held very similar views before his marriage.

"Bernard," said Lady Allardice, "you must be presented to your cousin Gwendolyn. I do not think you have ever met before."

Gwendolyn smiled, and held out her hand without rising. Bernard looked at her, blushed a little, and sat down in Cicely's vacated chair.

"Give us some music, do, girls," he said, looking at his sisters; "I've not heard a note these five days."

Bernard's great passion next to field-sport was music. The Allardices were all musical, and the sisters sat together at the piano and played brilliantly without any effort at effect.

"Is mamma playing match-maker already, do you think?" asked Cynthia under cover of the music. "She looks as if she were watching the impression produced on Bernard."

Cicely glanced first at her mother, and then at the two cousins seated near together. Bernard was playing with a feather screen, beating time to the music, and looking at his fair companion as though he found pleasure in the occupation. Gwendolyn did not seem to notice him much, except to answer from time to time an observation or question addressed to her.

Lady Allardice watched the pair somewhat keenly through her half-closed lids.

"It looks like it," answered Cicely after having made her inspection. "Is Gwendolyn rich?"

"Very, I believe. Her father has left her everything, of course; he was always a wealthy man."

Cicely smiled in a half-contemptuous fashion.

"Bernard has never developed a taste for heiresses so far."

"No. I believe mamma is always in fear of his making a low or a romantic marriage. I think she has hopes for him now. Gwendolyn is something different from the general run of girls about town."

"Now she may be," returned Cicely; "but what will she be after a few months' training in this house, with mamma's eye upon her?"

Cynthia slightly shrugged her graceful shoulders; but presently she said,—

"She is in deep mourning now, and Lent will be coming on before very long. Three quiet months may do much when a competent hand is on the reins. I think Bernard believes in mamma still. Men are so simple!"

The duet ended with a crash, and the players rose.

"Thank you," said Gwendolyn.

"You play like bricks," added Bernard; whilst Lady Allardice said languidly,—

"Thank you, dear girls; that was quite a treat."

Cicely resumed her book; Cynthia took a low chair near to Gwendolyn and Bernard.

"Now, Bruin," she said with a manner half-caressing, half-imperious, "you must be amusing. Tell us your adventures since you left. I know you have been hunting; and I expect it is the frost we have to thank,



not your domestic instincts, for driving you home at last. Let us hear all about it. Never mind about sticking too closely to fact—only be entertaining. Cousin Gwendolyn is in low spirits, and I am half dead of *ennui*. We both look to you to revive us.”

Thus adjured, Bernard launched out upon his favourite theme, and was both eloquent and amusing.

Gwendolyn had followed the hounds often enough to be pleasantly interested, and showed a knowledge of the subject which won many exclamations of surprise and admiration from Bernard. He waxed more and more vivid in his descriptions, and kept the party well amused.

At eleven they separated, and Cynthia carried Gwendolyn off to her room.

“Do you not have family prayers?” asked the latter with a little surprise.

“In the morning we do, but not at night. Not that I often trouble to be down. We are much too often out to attempt such a thing in the evening.”

“Oh, I fancied, from what Aunt Allardice said, you were very particular.”

“So we are—in our own way. Well, Gwendolyn, I suppose you ought to go to bed at once. You look tired enough; but I am not sleepy. I seldom retire at such a primitive hour. May I sit by your fire and chatter whilst you brush out your hair?”

“Yes, do; I should like it.”

Cynthia seated herself, and asked, without looking at her companion,—

"Well, and what did you make of Cicely and Bernard?"

"I thought Bernard very nice and amusing. He is like the people I have been used to. I don't think I understand *town* people yet, or their talk; but I understood Bernard well enough, and I could talk to him."

"And Cicely?"

"I do not know that I made her out. I am sure I do not understand her."

"No, probably not. I doubt if anybody does. Cicely makes that sad social blunder of playing the *femme incomprise*. In these days it is fatal. Men—people, I should say, do not like puzzles; and Cicely is an enigma. I think I understand her pretty well. She would tell you I knew nothing of her 'inner life.' That is the way with sisters. I wonder how you and she will get on."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE NEW LIFE.

DAYS passed swiftly at Grosvenor Square, and Gwendolyn, by the week's end, felt growing accustomed to the new life.

Her daily routine was something like this:—Breakfast at nine, followed by an hour's idling with Cynthia in the tiny boudoir opening from the drawing-room, which the eldest daughter had gradually monopolized as her special sanctum. At eleven she generally rode out, unless she felt the weather too cold, Cynthia being her companion, and Bernard seldom failing to be in attendance. Gwendolyn's own pet horse had been brought from Wylmington for her special use; and these morning rides were to her the pleasantest part of the day.

Cicely, so far, had never joined them. On the fifth day Gwendolyn inquired the reason:—

“Does she not care to ride?”

“Oh yes; but not in the Park, and not in the morning. Morning hours are sacred with her, and must be given to study. Who was it said of some clever woman that she got up every day at untimely hours to misin-

form herself? I sometimes fancy Cicely is something on the same pattern. I do not know what time she leaves her bed, but I know her mornings are spent in instructing or deluding her mind, whichever it may happen to be."

"We do not see much of her," remarked Gwendolyn.

"No; she has a mind above our petty frivolities," said Cynthia with gravity. "When we settle ourselves in the drawing-room, with our elegant fancy-work, to receive guests, or drive out to pay calls and sacrifice ourselves to society, Cicely is riding out into the country with her groom, or visiting in her disgusting district, or looking up absentees from her Sunday class. Well, I hope she will have her reward in this world or the next; for I can't imagine a more horrible way of victimizing oneself to duty."

"I liked going to see our poor people at Wylmington," remarked Gwendolyn.

"Ah, my dear, one's poor tenants in the country, and those miserable creatures in town, are a different race of beings. At Condover I play the Lady Bountiful and the ministering angel with all the grace in the world, whilst Cicely smiles in calm scorn, and says it is pauperizing them to give money and comforts to people who are not in want; and she hardly goes near them. You see we take quite different lines, as good sisters should, so that we never cut each other out. I give Cicely money from time to time for her wretched poor, but I really could not go to their dens. I don't think girls in our position, and with our training and feelings, should be expected to do so."

"I really don't know anything about it," answered Gwendolyn. "London is all strange to me. I always think it is nice to do good when one can."

"Quite so; but each in his own way. District visiting is not my way. Ah, there is Lord Tremain bowing to us!"

Gwendolyn looked up, and saw a grand-looking, gray-haired, elderly man lifting his hat with all the courtliness of a bygone generation. His face was not unknown to her, for she had seen him in her aunt's drawing-room one day that week; and although she had not caught his name, she had looked at him with interest, and thought him a very fine, handsome old man.

Part of the day's routine, unless the ladies drove out to pay calls, seemed to be the reception of afternoon guests; and Gwendolyn, from her shadowy corner, had seen already so many strange faces, and been introduced to so many new friends, that she had not felt able as yet to take in the individuality of more than one or two, of which Lord Tremain had been one.

"Doesn't he ride well?" asked Cynthia after he had passed. The Row was very full that bright morning, and he had not attempted to join the ladies. "It was General Alexander he was riding with. Did you notice their horses? Lord Tremain, I consider, is the best-mounted man in town. He will call again this afternoon. I saw it by the look in his eye. We will be at home."

"He called only three days ago, Cynthia."

"I know; but bachelors are privileged, especially

when they are wealthy and titled. He will have some good reason for his visit—tickets to offer us for something, or a box at a theatre. He is a very generous old man, is Lord Tremain.”

“And a bachelor, you say?”

“Well, I believe he is a widower really; but his wife has been dead so many, many years that really she does not seem to count. He married at one and twenty, and lost his wife and baby-boy within the year. I suppose he must have taken his loss very much to heart, for he has never married again, although every one says he ought; for unless he has a son, the estates and fifty thousand a year will all pass at his death to a scape-grace nephew, who spends his time for the most part at Baden and Homberg on the strength of his prospects.”

Gwendolyn listened with interest to the early romance and blight which had fallen upon the life of the old nobleman; but she was not woman of the world enough, so far, to see any special significance in what Cynthia had told her. She liked Lord Tremain all the better for the sorrows he had seen.

Lady Allardice was out that afternoon. Cicely was out too, so Gwendolyn and Cynthia had the drawing-room to themselves, and made themselves cozy by the blazing fire. The two girls had drawn a good deal together during the past days, and to Gwendolyn this sort of sisterly relationship had all the charm of novelty; and the new life, too, was not without its attractions, for the girl was naturally fond of society and change.

So far, of course, she had gone nowhere, and would

not do so for some months to come; but she lived in a busy household, and saw much to enliven and distract her mind from gloomy thought.

Cynthia, in spite of her slight mourning, went out almost every night; but as she never started till after ten, and Gwendolyn was used to early hours, she did not feel lonely in her absence. She would go up with her cousin, and watch her array herself in her most bewitching robes; and when the fair vision had departed, she would undress and go to bed, and sleep soundly until the arrival of the returned Cynthia awoke her, and she roused herself to listen with interest to the account of the gay scene in which her cousin had been partaking.

All this was very fascinating and interesting to Gwendolyn, and she had already begun to wonder if the time would seem very long before she could take part in doings, of which she now only heard at second hand.

Cynthia was sketching out for her benefit that afternoon the daily routine of life when the season should really begin, and she was listening with a sense of bewilderment which gradually expressed itself in her face; whereat Cynthia paused and asked,—

“Well, Gwendolyn?”

“It seems such a whirl to me. I thought you were very gay now.”

Cynthia laughed.

“Gay! why, there is hardly enough going on to keep one alive. Lent will be worse, because mamma likes to be very strict, and knocks off dances and theatres. If it

were not for the season to look forward to, I should just die of *ennui*."

"Do you enjoy the season so very much?"

Cynthia's lip curled a little.

"Do we ever really enjoy anything after we have passed our first childhood?"

"Why, yes; at least I do," answered Gwendolyn, her eyes opening wide. "I have always enjoyed everything so far. When I have got used to—to—to being without papa, and to the life here, I think I shall enjoy things very much."

"I hope you will. I daresay one does enjoy one's first season; but I can hardly remember mine. I came out at eighteen. Fancy that, Gwendolyn! Five seasons out, and not married yet! I shall soon be quite on the shelf. I wonder mamma has had the patience with me that she has."

"Is the main object of life to get married then?" asked Gwendolyn.

"To get *well* married, yes. Never forget that one delicate distinction."

"What constitutes a good marriage?"

"Money, my dear; money primarily. Of course if you can get increased social position, a title and a good old name, so much the better; but money is the real thing. A man may be a horrid cad, but if he has a big fortune at his back he is petted and pampered, called eccentric, manly, original—anything but what he is. Mamma is not so bad as some; she does draw the line at down-right, low-bred snobbishness. She has not quite for-



gotten that *noblesse oblige*. But things are not as they once were, and many fashionable, well-bred women draw no line at all. I call it positively disgusting."

Gwendolyn sighed.

"What is the matter now, my Golden Gwendolyn?" asked Cynthia.

"Golden Gwendolyn" was Cynthia's favourite song just now, and she often addressed her cousin by the title: from her lips it sounded always something like a caress.

"I hardly know. Things look so bright at a distance, but when one begins to talk—"

"The illusion vanishes. Exactly so. It is always the way. Perhaps it would be kinder to let you find out for yourself—to make out that life is a bed of roses without a thorn. But you ask so many questions that I have no chance."

"I would rather know the truth at first," answered Gwendolyn. "I used to fancy that life in the world was a real, solid thing—roses and thorns too, of course, but still real and satisfactory. When you talk, it all seems a sort of sham. Do you really find it so very hollow, Cynthia?"

"Hollow is just the word to express it," Cynthia answered, leaning back in her chair, and playing with a peacock-feather screen. "Brilliancy and glitter without, emptiness and darkness within."

Gwendolyn's face grew grave and wistful.

"Is there no satisfaction, no light anywhere?" she asked slowly.

"Not that I ever found."

"Not even—not even in religion, Cynthia?"

"Religion seems to me the worst humbug of all."

There was no time for an answer, for the door was thrown open, and the footman announced,—

"Lord Tremain."

Cynthia darted one quick glance at Gwendolyn, and rose to receive the old man.

He looked very kindly and very fatherly, Gwendolyn thought, and took her hand in his when introduced, saying he had heard much of her, and felt sure they should be good friends.

"Oh yes, you are sure to like Gwendolyn; every one does," said Cynthia gaily. "Now draw up your chair to the fire, Lord Tremain, and join the magic circle. It has begun to snow, and it is getting dusk, so I don't think anybody else will favour us. We must make much of you, as you are our sole guest this dismal afternoon."

The gray-haired nobleman seemed quite content to be made much of by his two charming companions. He drew in his chair between them, and spread out his hands to the blaze.

"This is delightful, Miss Allardice! You always spoil me, I think. An old campaigner ought to be above such luxuries as this, ought he not? And I am afraid I have interrupted a most absorbing *tête-à-tête*. When two young ladies sit over the fire together, it is real desecration to disturb them."

Cynthia laughed, and then looked up with arch gravity through her long lashes.

"Lord Tremain, I will make a confession. Gwendolyn and I were so hard up for amusement, that we were absolutely reduced to talking philosophy. Could you imagine a more terrible state of things? Think what you have rescued us from! Now you understand why it was we were so glad to see you."

The old man chuckled to himself and nodded his head, as if much amused.

"I see I am not to be too much flattered, Miss Allardice. You are too much of the philosopher to permit your sweets to have no corresponding bitter. It is only young ladies like you who are always permitted to see everything *couleur de rose*."

Gwendolyn looked at Cynthia, who was still smiling gaily.

"And where," she asked laughingly, "did you obtain such exhaustive views on the subject of young ladies and their spectacles? Lord Tremain, I am afraid you are a great deal too knowing."

"I read my secrets in their own bright eyes," answered Lord Tremain, looking at Cynthia with an admiration and interest which were unequivocally expressed in his weather-beaten countenance. "Bright eyes undimmed by tears, looking out hopefully and trustfully into the unknown world beyond the sheltered home—eyes like that speak truth. We old stagers like to read in them innocence of evil and belief in good, unwarped as yet by any rough experience of life."

Cynthia dropped her eyes with a certain grave sweetness most bewitching.

"Lord Tremain," she said with a gentle gravity of tone very unlike her usual gay playfulness, "you must beware how you try to fathom such depths, or, unless you are a bold swimmer, you may chance to fall upon shoals and quicksands."

"My fair philosopher grows mystic. Explain yourself, Athena, queen of wisdom!"

But Cynthia was looking up at him again, the gay arch smile shining out of her eyes and dancing over her face like a sunbeam over water. Gwendolyn watched her with wonder and admiration. She had not seen her like this before.

"You a man of age and experience, and you ask a woman to 'explain herself!' Lord Tremain, I am surprised at you! I could not have believed it."

"Miss Gwendolyn," said the peer, turning suddenly to his right hand companion, "do you not find your cousin a very mischievous young lady?"

"I do not know," answered Gwendolyn slowly, feeling herself sadly deficient in that power of ready, piquant reply of which Cynthia seemed mistress. "You see I have not known her a week yet."

"Gwendolyn, for shame! Why do you not speak up for my character?" said Cynthia with great gravity.—"Lord Tremain, I shall become a philosopher indeed, if this sort of thing goes on, not to say a cynic and a misanthrope. Here I find an old friend like you turning round and attacking me; and my own cousin, to whom I have been devotedly playing the part of 'guide, philosopher, and friend,' not even trying to make

a stand in my favour. Oh, the ingratitude of the world !”

Lord Tremain laughed, Gwendolyn looked half amused and half perplexed, and the butler interrupted the conversation by bringing in the tea-tray and depositing it at Cynthia's elbow.

“Evidently an intervention of the higher powers to save us from a quarrel.—Lord Tremain, will you bury all enmity in a cup of tea ? But never let me hear you try again to undermine my character, and rob me of the few friends I possess, whose friendship is worth having.”

“Miss Allardice, you are cruel. You cut me to the heart. In token of your divine compassion, tell me that you rank me amongst those chosen few.”

Cynthia looked at him critically, with her graceful head a little on one side.

“I am not sure that I shall do so—not to-day at any rate.”

“To-morrow, then.”

“To-morrow we are not likely to meet.”

“I do not know. Are you not going to be at Lady Stormont's dance to-night ?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“I, too ; and it will be morrow ere we part. May I claim my answer with the last waltz ?”

“Do you waltz, Lord Tremain ?” she asked saucily.

“At your bidding I will even waltz, if you will be my partner.”

“Agreed,” laughed Cynthia. “I will.”

“And at the close I shall expect my answer.”

"You shall have it, if it is ready. A good deal will depend upon the waltz. How could I rank as a friend a man who could not dance?"

That evening when Gwendolyn went up to her cousin's room to watch her array herself for the ball, her face was unusually grave. When Cynthia was ready she dismissed the maid, bidding her let her know when the carriage came round, and sat down beside the fire, drawing her white furs more closely about her.

"You are grave and serious to-night, my Golden Gwendolyn."

"Am I? I didn't know. Cynthia, do you ever flirt?"

"Of course I do. Life is nothing but one great game of flirtation. Its study is of inestimable importance to a woman. Flirtation is a two-edged weapon. Rightly and skilfully wielded, it gives immense power and pleasure, makes you all but invincible; but clumsily and carelessly handled, it will recoil upon yourself and do irremediable harm."

"Are you an adept, Cynthia?"

"Practice makes perfect, or should do. I have had enough years of experience to have become so."

Gwendolyn looked dissatisfied.

"I should not like to think you a flirt, Cynthia."

"Why not, fair cousin?"

"I always thought it wrong and unwomanly to flirt."

Cynthia laughed her little sarcastic laugh.

"My dearest child, you must learn a little worldly wisdom in this new life of yours. You must not bracket

adjectives together as you did in your old simple existence. Many things you see may seem wrong in your eyes, but you will find them eminently womanly."

Gwendolyn paused awhile before answering, then she said slowly,—

"I believe you are a cynic after all, Cynthia."

"I am only what others make me, then," answered the girl bitterly. "Let me be myself with you, Gwendolyn. Don't oblige me to play a part when we are alone together. It is a relief sometimes to think aloud, and I have seldom been able to enjoy the luxury. Don't you turn against me."

"Dear Cynthia, you know I never should! I like to think you are yourself to me; but I wish you would be the same to the other people. What is the use of concealment? Why not speak out what you think?"

There was a tap at the door.

"Impossible, my dearest, most unworldly cousin. The Palace of Truth turned out a vast mistake, and led to sad complications. Farewell, sweet Puritan, my Golden Gwendolyn. You, too, will learn wisdom by experience."

Cynthia kissed her lightly on the brow, and vanished like a snow-wreath. Gwendolyn sat dreaming by the fire alone.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SUNDAY.

WHEN Gwendolyn opened her eyes upon the following morning, she remembered that Cynthia had not come into her room as usual after her dance, or else she had not succeeded in rousing her from sleep.

She rose and dressed, and peeped into Cynthia's room; but her cousin was sleeping, and she noiselessly withdrew. It was Sunday, the first Sunday since she had awakened from her dreamy state and had begun to take a part in the new life around her, and the girl felt some little curiosity to know how it would be spent. It seemed hardly possible that anything of the Sabbath stillness could penetrate through the turmoil of busy life which seemed to reign in this household.

She went downstairs, to find only Cicely in the breakfast-room, although it was already half-past nine, which was the Sunday breakfast-hour.

"Good-morning, Gwendolyn. We may as well get our breakfast. Nobody ever is in time on Sunday except myself."

"Why not?"



"I do not know, unless it is that there is nothing to come down for. We have no Sunday post in town, you know."

The two girls breakfasted together somewhat silently, then Cicely said,—

"Do you care to come to matins with me? or will you wait for the celebration, and go with mamma? She is evidently not coming to the whole service to-day."

"I will come with you," said Gwendolyn rather puzzled. "Do you have two services in the morning?"

"Matins and sermon at half-past ten, and full choral celebration an hour later. I go to both; but you can leave after matins if you like, and not go at all. The whole is rather long sometimes."

"I should like to stay," said Gwendolyn, "if you do."

"The music is beautiful," said Cicely. "You will like that in any case."

The two girls started together, well wrapped in furs. A frosty fog hung in the air, giving an unusual gloom to the world without. The pavements were slippery with trodden snow.

"The delights of London," said Cicely. "In the country it would be a clear sunny frost. You have made a bad exchange, Gwendolyn."

They were entering a region of poorer streets. Gwendolyn looked round, and asked,—

"Is your district near here, Cicely?"

"Not very far away, but not in any such aristocratic region as this."

"You visit very poor people, don't you?"

"Yes; I don't care about half-and-half arrangements. If I visit poor people at all, I like them to be really poor, not semi-demi."

"I should like to come with you some day," said Gwendolyn.

"I don't think you would if you tried."

"Don't you like it?"

"No."

"Then why do you do it?"

"For the same reason, I suppose, that most people occupy themselves—to fill up the time and to drown thought."

"I thought people went about among the poor to do them good, and to be of use in the world."

"I suppose we all start with some such notion, feeling that what is so disagreeable and repugnant must of necessity be right and satisfying. Experience teaches us that good works are just as dead as everything else, and just as meaningless."

"Then why don't you give up?"

"I hardly know myself. Partly, I suppose, because I am something of a machine, and once started I go on mechanically. Partly because, though the work is utterly unsatisfactory to myself, I suppose my visits would be missed, though political economists and thorough-going philanthropists would say I was doing more harm than good."

"I don't understand."

"I mean simply this. District visitors are supposed to do something towards relieving misery. They ought to give spiritual food. But I have none to offer. My own soul is starving more than theirs are; but I must do something, and so I feed their bodies. I can do that, and I think they like it just as well; but the clergy do not approve of my ways, and they would approve less did they know more. Now, here is the church. Follow me; all the seats are free, we must just find places as we can."

The large church was dim and full. The service was like nothing Gwendolyn had heard in her country home; but the beauty of the music and the reverence of the people soothed and comforted her. There was a good deal of passing backwards and forwards in parts of the church; but she and Cicely sat in a quiet corner, and a sense of peace and refreshment settled upon her spirit. She did not follow the service; she did not hear the sermon; but for all that she came away feeling that it had done her good.

"I am glad you liked it," said Cicely rather wearily. "I hope the feeling will not wear off."

"Why should it?"

"I cannot tell you why, but everything always does wear off with me."

"Did not you enjoy it too?"

"I always do enjoy the music. I often wish I could die in church, and go straight to the spirit-world, if there is one, to see things for myself."

"See what?" asked Gwendolyn.

"Everything," answered Cicely.

And then the conversation dropped, and the walk was finished in silence.

In the afternoon Cicely went off to her Sunday school, Lady Allardice established herself comfortably in the drawing-room, with a ponderous orthodox volume of theology, and Sir Frederic shut himself up in his study.

Cynthia and Gwendolyn repaired to the boudoir, and shut themselves in together there. Cynthia looked somewhat languid and heavy-eyed, as if her last night's dissipation had tired her. She had been unusually silent during the luncheon hour.

"Well, Cynthia," said Gwendolyn, after a good many minutes of silence, "did you enjoy yourself last night?"

"Oh yes, pretty well; it was very much the same kind of thing as usual."

"Was Lord Tremain there?"

"Yes."

"Did you give him his answer?"

"His answer? Oh yes; I enrolled him as a member of that select body—my friends. Much good my friendship will do him!"

The girl smiled in the way Gwendolyn least liked to see, and by-and-by the latter said,—

"I think Lord Tremain admires you very much, Cynthia."

"I have thought so myself of late."

"I noticed it both times that he came—at least I thought I did."

"Oh yes, I daresay; people tell me I am somewhat like the first Lady Tremain."

"The first Lady Tremain! Is he going to marry again, Cynthia?"

Cynthia slightly shrugged her shoulders.

"It looks rather as if he were contemplating the fatal plunge."

"Do you mean," asked Gwendolyn slowly, after a few minutes of hesitation, "that you think he wants to marry you?"

"I mean that people are beginning to talk about us; that is often the forerunner."

"But, Cynthia, he is older than your father."

"Only ten years or so. What of that?"

Gwendolyn was silent.

"A woman may not marry her grandfather," continued Cynthia, in the same faintly ironical way; "but there is no reason in the world why she should not marry her grandfather's contemporary."

"I wish you would not talk like that, Cynthia," said Gwendolyn quickly. "I don't like it. It sounds so—so worldly."

"Well, and I am worldly too; so it is all in character."

"Cynthia, now that you have said so much, you must tell me more. Do you mean that you would marry Lord Tremain if he asked you?"

"I think it highly probable."

"Are you fond of him?"

"Not particularly. I like him better than a young man. He is kind and fatherly, and would not make himself offensive or ridiculous. I might do much worse. He is very rich, and he is an earl."

"But, Cynthia, you would not surely marry for money?"

"I certainly shall do so. Money and love are the only two things worth living for. I would have married for love if I could, but that has been denied me. Now I must marry for wealth and position."

"Have you been in love, Cynthia?" asked Gwendolyn with quick sympathy.

"Oh yes; I have fallen into the snare like all the rest of us poor helpless women. I am in love now, for the matter of that. I do not suppose I shall ever be cured of my love; but that is no reason in the world why I should not marry."

"Love one man and marry another! O Cynthia, how can you talk so!"

"I only say out what other people do, and make a pretence that it is not so. What is the use of blinding one's eyes? I must marry. I cannot marry the man I love; so I must make the best bargain for myself that circumstances will allow."

"But can you ever be happy?"

"Happiness is comparative, and every one has his own standard. According to mine, I have no doubt I shall do very well. I shall shine in society as a brilliant

young countess, and I shall be as happy as I could expect to be."

Gwendolyn was silent awhile, and then she said gently,—

"Cynthia, I wish—if it does not hurt you—that you would tell me about the man you loved."

"Oh yes, you shall hear the story if you like," answered Cynthia listlessly; "talking hurts less than thinking, and you had better know what all the world knows. My love affairs were no secret."

She leaned back in her chair, looking pale and almost haggard. Gwendolyn had never before seen her brilliant young cousin look so old or so worn. It made her heart ache with sudden compassion.

"He came as Mr. Carlingford's curate about three years ago. His name is Reginald Kennedy. He is of good family; and he is very clever and strong and far-seeing,—not at all like the general run of young clergymen, or young men of any kind.

"He came of a good family, and mamma 'took him up,' if you know what that means. Mamma likes to interest herself in church affairs when it is easy and agreeable; and she invited Mr. Kennedy to her receptions, and introduced him and spoke well of him to every one.

"I was twenty then, and I had not learned my lesson yet. I still believed in people, and in the world, and in a variety of delusions, and any one could make me believe anything. Life seemed then a pleasant thing enough. A little, just a little, of the first glamour and illusion

had worn off,—just enough to make me feel that the daily round of riding, driving, and dancing could not fill one's soul for ever with delight and satisfaction. I was old enough to begin to have lofty ideals; not old enough to know how foolish and worse than foolish it is to indulge them. I believed life could be made a high, even a holy thing. I was just ready to fall a victim to any kind of enthusiasm or sentiment which should first reveal itself to me.

“Just at that juncture Reginald Kennedy appeared upon the scene, and I saw a good deal of him. He was about five years my senior, but he looked nearly thirty. He was more in earnest than any man I have ever met before or since. He was devoted to his work, and his sympathies and comprehensions seemed to embrace everything and everybody. He could be merry and boyish enough at times with children, or when things were gay around him, and he enjoyed a joke as much as any man I ever knew. But just as much did he throw himself into whatever work he had in hand, and, as I say, he was the most earnest man I ever knew. He was a thorough scholar, too, and had a splendid command of language. His sermons sometimes made one tingle from head to foot. In those days, listening to him, and hearing of him, and watching him, I used to think that I could and would be a good woman.

“I do not think he took much notice of me at first. He was kind and courteous, but did not seem to have much to say to young girls. I was pretty in those days, far prettier than I am now; but I do not think he was



a man who thought much of physical attractions: he looked below the surface.

"The first time, I think, that he ever noticed me particularly was this. It was a curious adventure, and made a great impression upon me at the time. I was driving home one night, alone, from a dance. How it was I was alone I don't remember; I think papa and mamma were staying the night at 'our host's, and that Bernard had elected to walk home. Anyway, I was alone in the carriage; and as we were driving through some low street, I saw Mr. Kennedy standing beneath a lamp-post and signalling us to stop. The coachman knew him and pulled up, and he opened the carriage door and looked in. When he saw that I was the only occupant, he hesitated a moment; but then, as if he felt impelled to speak, he said,—

"'Miss Allardice, I beg your pardon, I had no idea it was you. I hoped it was your empty carriage, or that it would be your father coming from the House. I was going to ask him to do me a great favour.'

"'What is it, Mr. Kennedy?' I asked; 'is it anything I could do?'

"'Yes,' he answered, 'you could do it; but I am not sure that you would like the task.'

"'Let me hear it,' I said; 'perhaps I am not so fastidious as you think.'

"Then he explained that there was a boy in the house he had just left, to whom he had been summoned an hour before, who had broken his leg most dreadfully and was in terrible pain. He ought to be taken at once

to the hospital, and no cab was to be had at such an hour, and its jolting would be agony to the poor child. If he were left till morning, inflammation would have set in, and amputation would become almost a necessity. Of course, what he wanted was the use of our carriage, and of course I gave it him. The footman and he went in and brought out the boy, wrapped in a blanket. I sat with my back to the horses, and the child was laid upon the wide seat. Mr. Kennedy held his head upon his knee and talked to him in a wonderful way, which he seemed to understand better than I; and so we got him to St. George's Hospital.

"Mr. Kennedy carried him in and saw that he was in good hands, and then came back to thank me. I asked to be allowed to drive him home, for he looked very tired, and he consented and seemed grateful. We talked as we drove,—such talk as I had never had before with any one. I can't tell how it was, but it seemed as if a new life suddenly opened out before me, and a life worth living.

"After that we saw a great deal of each other, and by-and-by he asked me to marry him, and I said I would,—I loved him more than life. I never knew till then how it was possible to love. But that is not interesting to you or to anybody else.

"Well, we were engaged; and mamma smiled sweetly upon our young romance, and told everybody that her dear girls would always be allowed to follow the dictates of their hearts, and that although sweet Cynthia might have looked higher, still Mr. Kennedy was so *good*, such a

devout *churchman*, so devoted and so unworldly, it was quite a comfort to feel her darling child would be so well cared for.

"I did not know then that Reginald was very near to a peerage—so near that he was looked upon as practically the heir. Six months after our engagement the old earl married, and a year later a son was born. From the moment that the world was astonished by the marriage, mamma steadily set herself, in her own sweet, maternal way, against our engagement. When the baby arrived we were just separated. How she did it I cannot tell you. I could not make it out even at the time; but it was done. We were not weak, and we were not foolish, and we loved each other; and yet she broke off the engagement. Such things are done daily, no one knows how. The ways of the world are like the wheels of the Juggernaut car: they pass on, killing and crushing all in their path, and seeming to do well by the act. We broke off the engagement, and Reginald went away to work amongst the degraded people in the east of London, and I am going to marry Lord Tremain."

That was the story of Cynthia's romance, and she told it without a tear or a sigh. Gwendolyn's eyes were wet; hers, hard and dry.

"O poor Cynthia! poor Cynthia!"

"You needn't pity me; I do not deserve it. But I might have been a good woman, if they would have let me."

"You can be good still."

"No, I can't; and I don't wish. I have nothing left to live for. Now I shall amuse myself my own way. I would have been good, if they would have left me Reginald. He would have made life real and noble, even my life. But now they have made me what I am; and I will be one of themselves—think as they do, act as they do, speak as they do."

"O Cynthia!"

"It is not my fault; I am past caring now."

"Don't say that."

"I only say the truth; I have done with aspirations."

Gwendolyn was silent, and then asked,—

"Do you ever see him now?"

"We have met twice, but have not spoken a word."

"Is he changed?"

"Yes; we are both changed. He is living for others now, and for the next world; I, for myself, and for this world."

"But, Cynthia, the Church and services, do not they help you?"

"They were real, living things once. Reginald was a man who made one believe in God and in God's Church. They were full of noble meaning once,—the familiar words which now are cold and dead. No, Gwendolyn; I have done with such things now. Do not try to change me; I must live what is left to me of life my own way."

"And how must I live?"

"How can I tell?"

"Must I give up all aspirations, all ideals?"

"I dare not advise; but I know only too well what becomes of them in the life we lead."

"Dear girls," said Lady Allardice's voice at the door, "will you not come and have some tea? I am quite tired of my own society; you must take pity upon me and enliven my solitude."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

So far Gwendolyn had felt like a mere spectator in the drama of life which was opening now before her. So far it had not seemed to her as if she could ever herself take a part in the curiously-constituted household of which she was a member; that it would be always her fate to be a mere onlooker—Cynthia's confidante, Cicely's companion, as the case might be—but not to play a real part of her own, not to feel herself a centre of interest.

Some such feeling is a common enough element of a new life, and every one is more or less conscious of it at one time or another; but it is a sensation which cannot last, and which circumstances always quickly dispel.

Gwendolyn gradually awoke to the consciousness that she, too, had her own individual life to lead, and that her life would not long remain smooth and colourless, as it had looked when contrasted with the troubled lights and shadows which she had already seen in her cousin's.

By the time a fortnight had passed, Gwendolyn began to feel that she had fairly settled down to a London life, and she was too much interested by all she saw to regret

the quiet existence she had left behind. Sometimes she felt, with a pang of shame and pain, that her father's memory was growing dim—that she seldom felt that sense of desolate bereavement which she was certain a child ought to experience who has suffered the loss of an only remaining parent. She was most certainly growing pleased and interested by the variety and incident of her present life.

Her deep mourning did not exclude her from all social recreation. She saw a great many people and made a great many acquaintances, and she was pleasantly conscious of being liked and admired by most of the people to whom she was made known. Cynthia was fond of telling her that there were many triumphs in store for her in the days to come.

"I shall make you the fashion when I am Lady Tremain and you have cast off your black shell," she would sometimes say. "I shall delight in making the world rave about my Golden Gwendolyn. There is nothing so amusing as moulding public taste; and you will not be like Cicely, I hope, and soar above the delights of being admired. You are beautiful, and an heiress in your own right, and have the world before you. Don't you let mamma dispose of you; wait till I am in a position to play chaperon. I shall make you change black for white when I am married, and then I shall take you in hand."

Considering that Cynthia was as yet not even engaged, Gwendolyn had thought these arrangements a little premature; but she knew her ignorance on such

points, and maintained a discreet silence. It was not unpleasant to feel that some day she might shine in society as she saw Cynthia shining now.

Cynthia was very brilliant on this particular evening. There were a great many guests in Lady Allardice's drawing-room, and Gwendolyn, who sat somewhat apart as a spectator, felt almost as if she were at a party, instead of a simple rehearsal.

This meeting had been summoned under the pretence of rehearsing, although so far little had been done which could pass under that name.

It had been a severe winter, and the poor had suffered unusually, and the clergy of the Allardices' church had appealed in strong terms to their wealthy and fashionable congregation for more help to meet the present distress. The appeal was at once responded to, and people prepared to bestir themselves; but they did so in their own way, determined, if possible, to combine amusement for themselves with relief for the poor. It was proposed that a series of entertainments, musical and dramatic, should be got up, and that only guinea tickets should be issued. The entertainments were to take place in private houses, and all the artistes were to give their services. Thus the expenses would be reduced to a minimum, and all the proceeds go to the church funds.

Lady Allardice was of course well to the front in any such movement as this one, and she made herself responsible for two of these entertainments, one of which was to be musical and the other dramatic. It was to



arrange and rehearse for one or both of these that the present company had now assembled.

Gwendolyn, who had declined, under the circumstances, to take any part in the performances, was sitting apart, amused and interested by all she saw and heard, but conscious that small progress seemed to be made towards any results, when somebody suggested "toy-symphony," and a general movement seemed to take place.

Cicely produced a box of odd-looking toys, all of which produced ghastly and discordant sounds when pounced upon by the company and blown or rattled or thumped according to their respective natures.

One or two violins were produced by different members of the assembled artistes, who had brought them in case of necessity, Bernard's 'cello and many music-stands were brought in, and a great tuning-up and taking of places began, which Gwendolyn watched with amused interest.

"Well, what do you think of it all?" asked a voice at her elbow.

"What are they going to do?"

"Try a toy-symphony—Franklin Taylor's, I believe—out and out the best. It's very pretty when it's well done, but they will make a lordly hash the first attempt; you see if they don't."

"Aren't you going to help, Bertie?"

"No; I can't count my bars. Orchestral music isn't my line. I've a soul above its trammels. I suppose I ought to go to the piano to turn over for Cicely; but I feel more inclined to stay here and chaff.—

Ah! there's Eddison going; now my conscience is clear."

"Yes, stay here with me, and tell me about the people," said Gwendolyn. "Fancy, there is Lord Tremain going to perform."

"Upon the triangle; so he is. A truly aristocratic instrument, second only to the Jew's harp. (I can play the Jew's harp most tellingly, by-the-by.) I suppose Cynthia has bribed him to the attempt. I know he can't count *his* bars."

It was Bertie Heron who was talking to Gwendolyn now; and Bertie Heron was what Cynthia called "quite an institution at our house."

To begin with, he was "a kind of a cousin," and therefore treated as a son of the house, although the cousinship seemed to Gwendolyn to be of a very vague description. He also seemed to be on the same easy footing of intimacy in many other houses, and to be a kind of pet and playfellow of the whole Allardice circle.

Cynthia had once summed him up in her own peculiar fashion for her cousin's enlightenment:—

"He is just everybody's Bertie Heron, and most people's cousin. It is the fashion to make a pet of Bertie. He goes everywhere and knows everybody. He is of very good family, but he is quite poor; so he is not even dangerous. He never falls in love, and nobody falls in love with him. He can just knock along alone upon his income and do nothing, and he keeps out of debt in a wonderful way; but if he took a wife—poor Bertie! He won't marry an heiress, and

he can't marry a poor woman. He is twenty-five, and he seems seventeen. Everybody likes him, and nobody is afraid of him. You had better adopt him as a cousin. He will be quite ready; and of course if he is our cousin he ought to be yours too."

Gwendolyn did not see that this necessarily followed; but she was willing enough to accept the new relation thus imposed upon her, and she and Bertie had quickly slipped into the easy and familiar terms which came natural to him and were pleasant to her.

Gwendolyn found the toy-symphony rehearsal and Bertie Heron's comments very entertaining. She was laughing over some break-down which had just occurred, when her attention was arrested by hearing her companion say,—

"Here's Dalrymple."

A tall, dark, very handsome man was shaking hands with Lady Allardice. Gwendolyn was struck by his face, and did not remember to have seen him before.

"Who is he?"

"He's Sir Kenrick Dalrymple, a baronet with a long pedigree and short rent-roll. He's a kind of a sort of a cousin of mine, and we have a few points in common."

"He is very good-looking."

"Yes, he's a handsome chap, and a good fellow to boot, which one can't say of them all. He's quite the hero of romance too—in appearance, at least. I heard Cynthia describe him once as 'a haggard man with a woe.' Isn't it good?"

Gwendolyn could only answer by a smile, for the haggard man with the woe was leisurely crossing the room in their direction.

"Ah, Bertie! how do, old fellow?"

"As well as could be expected in your absence. May I present you to another of my cousins, Miss Maltby?"

Gwendolyn and the baronet exchanged bows, and the latter observed, as he took a seat at right angles to their settee,—

"Your cousins, Bertie, are like the sand upon the sea-shore for multitude."

"One can never have too much of a good thing," laughed Bertie. "What have you been doing with yourself the past weeks? And what brings you here to-night?"

"Chance brings me here to-night; and I've been hunting in Hampshire, where the frost couldn't resist the sun. Other fellows, I hear, haven't been so lucky."

A little sporting talk ensued, during which Gwendolyn studied the face of the new-comer with some little interest.

It was a fine, well-modelled face, with refined and sensitive features, and a good deal of power in the lines of the mouth and chin. The brow was broad and thoughtful; the dark eyes full, soft, and expressive—melancholy eyes they were, which looked melancholy even when the lips smiled, melancholy when they flashed with anger or excitement; the nose was thin and straight, with sensitive, clearly-cut nostrils; and the mouth, which was concealed by no moustache or beard,

was firm and somewhat haughty in expression, the short upper lip conveying an idea of pride and scorn which the melancholy curve at the corners rather belied.

Altogether, Gwendolyn was interested in the grave, "romantic-looking" man before her, and wondered if it was some trouble that had made him pale and thin and sad. He talked cheerfully and smiled readily, and his voice was clear, low-toned, and musical; but it, too, like all else that belonged to him, was distinctly tinged with melancholy.

The music came to a sudden, ignominious conclusion—a hopeless break-down had occurred.

"I beg your pardon—my fault," said the voice of a confused youth.

"Bertie," said Cicely, looking across the room, "will you please come here and turn over for me? Mr. Eddison is confused by the manuscript."

Bertie obeyed, and left Gwendolyn to entertain or be entertained by Sir Kenrick.

"What are they engaged upon this Pandemonium for?" he asked, as the wild tumult of instruments began once again.

"My aunt, Lady Allardice, has consented to get up two entertainments for the church. I think this toy-symphony is to be given at one."

"Ah! I see. Fashionable alms-giving. Why can't people give their guineas to the church without having the drums of their ears broken first?"

"I don't know; I suppose they like it. When they have practised more I dare say it will sound better."

"We will hope so, for the sake of the audience. You are not taking part yourself?"

"No."

Sir Kenrick glanced at her deep mourning garb and said no more upon the subject.

"Are you making a long stay in town?"

"I am living here now," Gwendolyn answered quietly. "I shall be here as long as my relations are."

He lifted his eyes then, and looked at her more attentively than he had done before. Then he smiled, and said in a slightly-altered tone,—

"Ah! then, I may hope to become better acquainted. I, like Sir Frederic, am obliged by my position to remain a long while in town."

"Are you in Parliament too?"

"Yes. I am afraid I ought to be prouder of the distinction than I am. One's ideas of the nobility of the position hardly stand the test of experience. One can see too much of a great thing; and great things are apt to look small upon close acquaintance."

"Yes," assented Gwendolyn, and she sighed.

"Have you found the same?" he asked with more interest than he had before evinced.

"I hardly know; I am afraid I shall find it only too soon. It seems as if nothing here were made to stand the test of close inspection."

"No?" he answered interrogatively; adding, as she did not speak, "What have you specially in your mind, if you do not consider the question an intrusive one from a mere stranger?"

This was the first time that any one of the many people whom Gwendolyn had lately met had advanced beyond the merest trivialities of small talk, and she was not at all disposed to resent as intrusive an attempt to draw the conversation into a graver key. If the growth of her serious thoughts and higher impulses had been somewhat checked by the atmosphere which she now breathed, they had not been killed, and they were ready to shoot out life if only they received the smallest encouragement. Sir Kenrick Dalrymple looked and spoke as though he too had experienced what Gwendolyn was experiencing now.

"I hardly know if I have anything special on my mind, but I feel as if everything is different from what I expected."

"What did you expect?"

"That I can hardly tell either; but you know I have always lived in the country till now, and country people fancy, I think, that things are much more *real* in town than with us, more real and more earnest; and now it seems as if it were not so at all."

Sir Kenrick smiled.

"You find us all sadly flippant and frivolous, Miss Maltby. Is not that so?"

"No; I never said or thought any such thing. I feel as if I do not understand the way in which people here think."

This observation was somewhat involved, but Sir Kenrick seemed to grasp its meaning.

"Or, perhaps, they do not think at all?" he sug-

gested, leaning his head on his hand and looking at her with some earnestness.

"Oh, but they do—some of them do; only they seem to have such a different standpoint from mine."

"A higher or a lower one?"

"I do not know. It seems more practical; but I should not like to have to think as they think, or see what they seem to see."

"Ah!"

Sir Kenrick said no more for a while. He and his companion both sat silent and thoughtful.

"You know what I mean?" said Gwendolyn by-and-by.

"I have an idea, at any rate a surmise. If you have come into our world with the lofty ideals of youth and inexperience, I am afraid you will have some severe shocks before you."

The same old story—the same cynical warning! Would nobody, could nobody live in the world, and yet believe in what was high and holy? Gwendolyn leaned forward with clasped hands and speaking eyes.

"Sir Kenrick," she said earnestly, "why should it be so?—why do you let it be so? Why must every ideal, every aspiration be renounced as soon as we come into 'your world'? You yourself call it 'our world.' If it is your world, why do you not make it better? It is you men who have the power—it is you who are the leading influence, and whose example we follow to a greater or less extent. You give the cue, and we follow it up. You have double our independence, double



our opportunities. If you are content to sink to such a level, we are powerless to rise. Why do you do it?"

"Miss Maltby, there is much truth in what you say, and I admit it; but what can I do? What can one man do against ten thousand? You look and speak as if you held me personally responsible."

"Every one is personally responsible," answered Gwendolyn quickly, "women as well as men; only I have seen lately how comparatively helpless women are, especially when they are young, and when they grow older they seem to care less and less about the way things go. Men are different. They can emancipate themselves; and they do. Why cannot they do something to raise the tone of society? Why do not you do something yourself?"

"I do not feel cut out to lead a crusade."

Gwendolyn's face clouded; there were both sadness and scorn in her voice as she said,—

"Yes; I suppose everybody says that—everybody makes out that one man can do nothing; and so, as the result, nobody tries to do anything. If that principle were carried out consistently, we should soon have a very enlightened and progressive world."

"You are severe, Miss Maltby."

"No, I am not; at least I don't mean to be. If what I say is severe, whose fault is it?"

"More cutting still."

Both were silent for a while, and then Sir Kenrick said,—

"Things are not quite so bad as you seem to think,

Miss Maltby; our little world is not everything. There is a great deal of earnest, honest work being done in other quarters."

"Yes; I hope there is. But why is it excluded from 'our world'? Why are we to go on being simply frivolous and fashionable and elegantly idle? Why cannot people be just a little in earnest, just a little sincere, without talking about leading crusades, which means, I suppose, in plain language, making themselves ridiculous, and alienating instead of encouraging other people."

"Are you sure people cannot be in earnest, even in our little world?"

"No; I am not sure. I think some do try; but everything seems against them. It always seems to me that whatever they may pretend to do, they are really sneering at and trying to hinder any sort of goodness and earnestness which comes in their way, as if they were afraid it would show up their conduct to disadvantage when it came in contact—"

The music suddenly ceased again, and brought Gwendolyn's observations to an abrupt conclusion.

"We will continue our discussion another day," said Sir Kenrick. "I have found it very interesting. I am most pleased to have made your acquaintance."

Gwendolyn smiled; she had been pleased and interested too, and her face showed it.

"I shall think of what you have said," he continued. "Perhaps it may lead to some results. Who knows?"

Again Gwendolyn smiled.

"I am afraid you must think me very presuming. You know so much and I so little."

"Not at all, Miss Maltby. I feel as if it were I who have been the novice, you the teacher. We will talk more of this at another time."

People were beginning to shake hands and go; the clock chimed the half-hour before midnight. Arrangements were being made for another rehearsal.

Sir Kenrick made his adieu to Gwendolyn and to the rest of the company and departed, carrying off Bertie Heron with him.

"You seemed to get on like a house on fire with Gwendolyn Maltby," remarked the latter. "She's a beautiful woman, isn't she?"

"Yes; and rather a clever one, too, I should say. Who is she?"

"Lady Allardice's niece. Her father died this month. She has come into a lot of money, I believe—is quite an heiress, in fact."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; why shouldn't you and she fall in love, Ken? She's too good to be wasted on a fortune-hunter."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A MORNING WITH CICELY.

"ARE you going into your district this morning, Cicely?"

"Yes."

"May I come with you?"

"Why do you want to come?"

"I hardly know; only I feel so idle and selfish, never doing anything for anybody. Perhaps I should feel better if I saw a little of real life."

Cicely's lip curled slightly.

"I doubt if you will feel any the better for anything you will see in my district."

"Would you rather I did not come?" asked Gwendolyn, her voice expressing some little disappointment.

"I hardly know; perhaps on the whole I do prefer to do my district visiting alone—at any rate I have never had a companion yet. But if you really care to come, you shall."

Cicely looked at Gwendolyn as she said this with one of her rare smiles, which seemed to rob her words of all ungraciousness.

"I should like to go very much," said Gwendolyn.

The two girls started together, plainly dressed in long fur-lined cloaks. Cicely carried a small bag, which seemed to contain a few papers and tickets.

As they were nearing the streets whither they were bound Mr. Carlingford, the rector, met them, and stopped to speak a few words to Cicely. It was the first time Gwendolyn had seen him outside the church, and his kind, shrewd, earnest face attracted her pleasantly.

"Is Mr. Carlingford a good man?" she asked, when he had passed on.

"Very, I imagine."

"Don't you know?"

"What do any of us know about any one else, if it comes to that? Mr. Carlingford is an excellent clergyman for aught I know to the contrary."

"I like his face."

"Yes, it is a good face—strong and kind. He is the sort of man one wants for parish work."

"Will he prepare me for confirmation? You know I am to be confirmed in the spring."

"No; I didn't know."

"Yes; papa did not care about such things, and I did not know. I told Aunt Allardice about it."

"Oh yes; mamma is very orthodox on such points. She will have you confirmed properly, just as she would have you vaccinated. It is the proper thing to do."

"But, Cicely—"

"Well?"

"Don't you believe in such things?"

"Believe in confirmation? Oh yes; it is a very

proper sort of thing, and a regular institution, but not an article of belief exactly."

"But doesn't it help people to be good?"

"I don't know. It may help some."

"Didn't it you?"

"No, I don't think so. I heard too much about the white dresses and veils, and the young aristocracy who were to share the ceremony."

Gwendolyn was silent for a while. Talking with Cicely always seemed to quench her ardour.

"It may be different with you, perhaps," added her cousin, after a pause.

"I hope so," and Gwendolyn sighed. "I feel as if I did so want something to take hold of."

"I suppose most people do that."

"And I thought that religion, and confirmation, and all that sort of thing would be sure to give it."

"Religion might, perhaps. I don't profess to know. I can't say much about confirmation and that sort of thing."

"I do think, Cicely, that you puzzle me more than Cynthia does."

"Do I?"

"Yes: because she doesn't profess to care about going to church or to Holy Communion, or doing anything for anybody; but you do—at least you do the things—and yet you don't seem to get any satisfaction out of it."

"I don't suppose any one does it to get satisfaction—not after the first trial at any rate; if they do, they must be very sanguine specimens."

Gwendolyn sighed, as she made answer,—

"It's very miserable to begin to find out how hollow everything is."

"Very," assented Cicely; "only I suppose it's better found out young rather than old. Take my advice, Gwendolyn, and be a butterfly; they have the best time of it, after all. The less one can think the better. Don't you begin; if you do, you'll never enjoy yourself thoroughly again.—Here, this is my first house. There is a man here dying of consumption. He has half a dozen children, a sickly wife, and six shillings a week from his club. Do you care to come in?"

"Yes, I'll come."

The girls mounted to the second-floor room, knocked, and entered. There was nothing exceptionally squalid or offensive in the room and its occupants, and yet the scene was a revelation to Gwendolyn of a hopeless sort of poverty which she had not realized before.

Cicely talked in a quiet, business-like fashion to the pale, heavy-eyed woman about her needlework and the health of the children, three of whom were crowded together in a corner, with an old battered saucepan for a toy. She asked the sick man about his cough, his medicine, and the doctor's visits; and she laid upon the table a soup and coal ticket and some silver. When asked to do so, she read a portion of Scripture, to which the dying man listened with a sort of feverish earnestness; but she made no comment on what she read, and met the eager, hungry glance of the dying eyes with her usual calm expression of indifference.

"Them's beautiful words, ma'am," he said in quick gasps; "but it don't seem as if I could rightly get hold of the meaning."

"Can't you? The meaning is plainly expressed. Perhaps it will come to you later. Would you like to see one of the clergy?"

"No, ma'am, thank you, not particular; they couldn't tell me no plainer than you. It's my head as is in fault. Seems like as if I'm too ill and stupid like to take it in. Poor folks like us hasn't larning enough to get religion."

Cicely rose and looked at the wife.

"I will look in again next week. You can let me know if you want anything in particular for your husband before then."

"Thank you, ma'am, thank you kindly. I'm sure I don't know how we should ha' lived through this if it hadn't been for your goodness."

When the two girls were in the street together, Gwendolyn said eagerly,—

"O Cicely, why didn't you say something?—why didn't you give him some comfort?—why didn't you tell him the truth?"

"What truth?"

"Oh, you know. Why didn't you tell him that God loved him, and Christ died for him? I don't know how to say it—I was not taught as you have been; but you know."

"No, I don't; I only know what other people say—I know nothing myself. Second-hand information is a



poor sort of thing. If you can't speak from personal experience, you had better not speak at all."

"Oh but, Cicely, he did so want some comfort! You might have told him something. Fancy letting him think that religion was only for rich people or learned people. You ought to have said something then."

"No," she said in quiet, resolute tones; "I told Mr. Carlingford plainly that I would visit his poor and look after them to a certain extent, but that I could not administer spiritual consolation. He accepted my services on these terms, and I am not going to violate them."

"But you *know*, Cicely, that religion is just as much for the poor as for the rich. The happiest people I have known have been quite poor. You might at least have told him that."

"If you once begin to talk there is no end to it, and you are out of your depth before you have time to look round you."

Gwendolyn was silenced; but by-and-by she said, with a long-drawn sigh,—

"I know if I were you, Cicely, I would not be content with that."

"Who says I am content?"

"Well, no, I know you are not that; but I feel as if I would get to know more, and then take the good news to the poor people."

"Ah, just so; but how do you know that more knowledge would be good news? Is it not sometimes true that ignorance is bliss?"

"You do not seem to have found it so."

"Half knowledge is not, at least, and that is my condition at present."

"People always say half knowledge is worse than anything. I know papa thought so."

"You had better avoid it then."

The next visit stopped the conversation at this point, and there was no time to renew it, because one visit now followed hard upon another.

Gwendolyn saw many sad sights, many dismal homes. She realized, as she had never done before, what real poverty was like—the sordid, helpless poverty of a large city. She saw pale, sickly children, grown old before their infancy was past; gaunt, hungry-eyed men, thrown out of work by no fault of their own (far more to be pitied than those who drank away their good name); and hard-faced, hard-handed women, who found life too sore a struggle to have time to think of gentle, womanly words and ways.

Cicely went about amongst these melancholy beings with a quiet self-possession and a business-like comprehension of their affairs and wants which inspired Gwendolyn with great respect. She stood up fearlessly before a great giant of a fellow who had beaten his wife in a drunken fury, and who seemed half-tipsy still, and gave him her mind so freely that he slunk away like a cur with its tail down, and, as was afterwards ascertained, remained sober a whole three weeks afterwards—an unprecedented abstinence in his case. She despatched truant children to school with a severe rebuke, in spite of the pale faces which went to Gwendolyn's heart.

She discussed family troubles with worried mothers, and generally had some practical suggestion to offer. She sent one sick man off to a hospital, promised another a letter to a convalescent home, and seemed accurately informed as to the exact circumstances of all the people she visited.

Gwendolyn looked on and listened with an increasing respect and admiration, only wondering now and again how it was her cousin could be content without saying some few words about a happier and holier life to people who could have so little happiness in this.

"I should like to go and do good to people," said Gwendolyn to herself; "but I don't feel as if I could, if I hadn't anything better to tell them of than coal-clubs and soup-tickets. I should like to be able to help them as Cicely does, but I should want something more too. Oh dear me! when shall I be able to understand things as I believe they are to be understood?"

Cicely was somewhat silent and absorbed upon her walk home.

"Are you tired?" asked Gwendolyn.

"Not particularly. Well, what did you think of it all? Do you feel any better for it?"

"No; I think I feel worse."

Cicely smiled.

"But I should not if I had done what you have. I wish I could be useful like that."

"Oh, any one could do what I do. It's a mere question of memory, and methodical notes, and money with

me ; and I have always the pleasant feeling that I shall have to act a lie after every visit."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we are supposed to spend only the money allowed to us by the church, and dispense their tickets in our districts ; and if the cases under our care want extra help we are to report them, and leave the matter in the hands of higher authority. Now, my poor people are not worse off than hosts of others, and if I reported them, extra help would not be granted ; but I cannot go amongst them and not give them money and coal and food beyond the church allowance. When I send in my accounts at the monthly meetings I put down all the church relief accurately enough, but I make no mention of my private gifts, and I always feel as if I were telling a sort of a lie."

"But surely Mr. Carlingford knows—he would understand?"

"I believe he has his suspicions, and he is never tired of talking about 'judicious distribution,' and asking for all moneys to be paid into the general fund, so that it may be most equitably divided. I always think he looks at me ; but I never take any notice."

Gwendolyn of course sided warmly with Cicely :—

"Your money is yours, to do what you like with. Why should he mind?"

"Oh, he is right enough from his point of view. He goes everywhere, and sees people far more miserable than mine. Of course, he wants any surplus for them ; and if he were to hand them over to my care, they

would get it. But I am weak-minded on such points : suffering I actually see I must relieve. I can't go away and leave people without the necessities of life, because vague multitudes, of whom I know nothing, are starving. The misery in the world is an awful thing to think of. It seems to me the sensible thing to do is just to relieve to some purpose the little you can individually cope with, and try not to make life a burden by trying to solve insoluble problems. That is my view ; and if it is selfish and narrow, I can't help it."

"I should like to help you, Cicely," cried Gwendolyn eagerly. "I have plenty of money, Aunt Allardice tells me. Can't I do some good with it?"

"Yes, I suppose you can. Don't give it to me. I have plenty with my own and what Cynthia gives me. You know we both have property of our own, thank goodness, from our grandmother, so we are not dependent on mamma's liberality. Mamma has a conscientious objection to indiscriminate charity."

"Yours is not indiscriminate."

"It soon would be if I had to appeal often to her for money."

Gwendolyn pondered awhile, and then asked,—

"What can I do then?"

"Talk to Mr. Carlingford. He will tell you what you had better do with it."

"Would he let me have a little district, do you think?"

"Oh yes, if you wished it, when you are confirmed. All church workers must be members, of course, and communicants."

"Yes, I feel as if I should like to do something for all these poor people. Only I wish I could tell them more about how to be good."

"Perhaps you will be able to by-and-by. Mr. Carlingford will have taken you in hand by that time."

"I should like to talk to him. He could tell me what I want to know, couldn't he?"

"I should imagine so. He is a clergyman, and a good man too."

"Why don't you talk to him then?"

"I never talk to anybody on such subjects if I can help it," said Cicely, with a kind of weary indifference in her voice. "Talking, to my mind, is like pouring water through a sieve. Here we are at home, Gwendolyn, and I advise you to say nothing to mamma yet about your desire to have a district. Mamma has a way of encouraging and yet circumventing our little plans peculiarly her own."

## CHAPTER X.

### BETROTHED.

"ASLEEP, Gwendolyn?"

Gwendolyn had been fast asleep, for her morning with Cicely, and the thoughts it had inspired, had tired her more than usual; but she woke up wide on hearing these words, and looked at Cynthia with a smile.

"No; come in, Cynthia. I am awake now. What time is it?"

"Nearly three.—Adèle, bring me my cup of tea here, and go to bed. You look too sleepy to be of any use. Miss Maltby will unlace my dress."

And as the maid did her bidding and departed, Cynthia stirred up the fire into a ruddy blaze, and sank down into a low chair with a sigh, half of relief, half of satisfaction.

Gwendolyn left her bed, wrapped herself in her warm dressing-gown, and came and sat beside the fire too. Something in her cousin's manner had effectually aroused her.

Cynthia's cheeks were slightly flushed, and there was more light in her eye than usual. Evidently some-

thing had occurred to disturb her calm indifference of feeling.

As she did not speak for a while, Gwendolyn began to ask questions.

"You have something to tell me, Cynthia?"

"Yes."

"Something has happened to you?"

"Yes."

"Good or bad?"

"That you shall judge when you know all."

"Tell me then."

"Can't you guess?"

Thoughts of the old lover of Cynthia's romance flashed into Gwendolyn's mind, and Reginald Kennedy's name sprang to her lips; but an instinct of caution restrained its utterance, and she was glad afterwards that it had not escaped her.

"Tell me, Cynthia. I am a bad hand at a guess."

"It will not be any great shock to you. It is only that I am engaged to Lord Tremain."

"O Cynthia!"

"Well? You knew it was coming, did you not? I made no secret of it."

"No, you didn't. I suppose I did know, only—you know I'm not sure if I quite believed it."

"Believed that I should accept him? Did you think I should decline a countess's coronet?"

Gwendolyn made no reply to this query. She did not want to hear Cynthia's coldly calculating remarks about the advantages of wealth and a title. She wanted



to find out that it was no mere marriage for money, but that some little sentiment of love was mixed up with it.

"Tell me about it, Cynthia," she said, drawing up her chair close, and taking one of her cousin's hands in hers in a more caressing way than was usual between them.

Cynthia did not withdraw her hand; she let it remain in Gwendolyn's warm clasp. She laid her head against the cushions of her chair, and turned her face towards her cousin with a smile in her eyes half playful, half sad.

"Ah, my Golden Gwendolyn, it ought to have been you. You would have made him a far better wife; but men never understand such things."

"Hush, Cynthia; don't talk so. Please tell me all about it, if you don't mind."

"So you want a circumstantial record of the event, to see if you can find just one little bit of romance to satisfy your young heart? Foolish child; the days of romance are gone by. Besides, if there were any romance in the matter, I fancy one would decline to be communicative. Sentiment and folly, the sublime and the ridiculous, approach too closely together to bear description."

"Tell me your story then," repeated Gwendolyn,—"*a story without sentiment and without romance.*"

"Yes, that is just what it is; and you shall hear it. You know I was at Mrs. Carnforth-Meynall's to-night; she lives in one of those great houses in Palace Gardens, and she gave a big dance. Lord Tremain was there,

and almost as soon as I saw him I knew what was coming. He asked me only for one dance, and that quite late on in the evening; but he stood in the doorway the whole evening, and I think he hardly ever took his eyes off me. I knew he was watching me, so I thought I would show him what manner of woman I was, and I flirted unblushingly with all my partners, and made myself so charming that I could have had half-a-dozen offers in the course of the evening if I had chosen. It is rather the fashion with a certain set of men to admire me," continued Cynthia languidly. "I keep them in order by saying cutting things, and they stand in wholesome awe of my tongue; but they rave about me to one another, and are my very devoted servants. When I make myself agreeable for a change, I can bring them to my feet in a second. I seldom do it though."

Gwendolyn listened with interest, as she always did when Cynthia discoursed to her of the world with which she seemed so well acquainted.

"And you," she questioned, "don't you care for one of them? Can't you find some one really to love?"

"Love!" Cynthia laughed expressively. "They are all boys—puppies—æsthetic idiots or prating coxcombs. My dear Gwendolyn, when you have lived as long as I have in London drawing-rooms, you will learn to feel as I do towards drawing-room young men."

"But—"

"There are no 'buts' in the question; they are all alike, and all detestable, except to dance and to flirt

with. When they go out into the world and see life, and get some sense and manliness knocked into them, then they become tolerable, but not till then."

"Well, go on about Lord Tremain," said Gwendolyn, waving the other question.

"Lord Tremain, as I say, watched me unweariedly the whole evening through; and although I have made up my mind for some while to be his wife, a spirit of contrariety possessed me, and made me more fast, more careless of appearances, and altogether more 'the girl of the period' than I ever remember to have been before. I felt as if I were determined he should at least see the worst side of me before he took the plunge. He should not propose to me with his eyes shut, or cast it in my teeth later that I had deceived him."

"Perhaps you were right, Cynthia," said Gwendolyn thoughtfully; "but what happened then?"

"Well, our dance came on at last, and he claimed me. 'Do you particularly wish to dance?' he asked; and I said no, I had danced enough for one night. Then he gave me his arm and suggested that we should go and look at the flowers in the conservatory; and I suppose he had explored the premises before, or knew the house very well, for he took me into an odd little place beyond the conservatory and quite shut off from it, where it was almost impossible that we could be interrupted."

"Did you know he was going to propose?"

"Of course I did. I've had experience enough of all the preliminary symptoms, though I generally had the

grace and the presence of mind to check their growth and expansion. I always think it's bad taste for a woman to let a man propose, unless she means to have him, or unless she really can't help it, which of course does occur pretty frequently. Anyway that has been my principle; only in this case I had not to put the break on, for I meant to say yes to what I knew Lord Tremain meant to say to me."

"What did he say?" asked Gwendolyn, with a not unnatural curiosity; "I should so like to know."

"He said the usual sort of thing. He did not strike out a new line for himself; only he did it in a paternal and old-fashioned way, which was infinitely superior to the general run of things. He told me he had been learning to love me for a long time now, and that he had done all he could to keep his love in check, feeling the vast difference in our ages, and how unlikely it was that I could ever even dream of marrying a man so much older than myself. However, as time had gone on and his love had still strengthened, he had felt determined to try his chance and tell me of his feelings. He had fancied, why he hardly knew, that I was not happy in my present life, and he felt as if he could make me happy by his love and care. He was very modest: he could not expect that I should give him such love as I could to a younger man; but he had noticed how little I seemed to care for young men, and it had given him courage to hope that my heart was free. He loved me so much, he concluded by saying, that if I would only consent to be his wife, he felt sure

he could make me happy, and he had even great hopes that I might come to love him in time."

Cynthia paused, and Gwendolyn asked quickly,—

"Well, what did you say? what did you do?"

"I sat very quiet, playing with my fan, whilst he made his long speech, feeling how very unworthy I was of a sound, honest love like that, and what a bad bargain he was endeavouring to make. I was trying to make up my mind how much or how little I ought to tell him."

"Well?"

"Well, I suppose there must be a kind of a goodness in me somewhere. Papa, I often think, is naturally honest and open, and he is so certainly when mamma is not there. I suppose I must have inherited a portion of his blundering veracity; for the first thing I did, before giving Lord Tremain an answer, was to tell him the whole history of my engagement with Reginald Kennedy."

"O Cynthia, I am glad! I am so glad! What did he say to that?"

"Well, if I must tell the whole truth, he was so kind and sympathetic and paternal that I just began to cry—yes, Gwendolyn, a real, honest boo-hoo—and then matters settled themselves somehow, for he took me in his arms and let me boo-hoo upon his shoulder; and if I speak the unvarnished truth, I believe he liked me all the better for my blundering and my crying, than if I had behaved, as I had always planned to behave, with my usual graceful *sang froid*."

"I'm sure he would!" cried Gwendolyn warmly. "O

Cynthia, I feel so glad you told him everything. And you really engaged yourself to him?"

"I told him he would make a bad bargain; but that if he wished it still, I would marry him, and be a good wife if I could. I told him I was fond of him, and very grateful to him, which is true enough; and that I don't think I shall ever be able to love again as I did once, which I know is true. I told him that I was hard, and cold, and worldly-minded, and was not at all the kind of woman he thought I was. I almost told him I was marrying more for position and title than for anything else; but I felt just fond enough of him at the time to keep that to myself. I do not think I need criminate myself more than I have done. He knows all about Reginald, and that I am not really cured of my love, though I know it is quite hopeless; and if he is content to take me on those terms, I am content to be his wife."

There was a long pause then, which Gwendolyn was the first to break.

"And are you happy, Cynthia?"

"I am not unhappy at any rate. It is something to be able to say that, on the night upon which one has pledged one's hand in marriage."

"Your mother will be pleased. Does she know yet?"

Cynthia's lip curled slightly.

"No, not yet. I repressed my yearnings for maternal embraces and benedictions. Lord Tremain will call on papa to-morrow morning. That will be time enough."

Gwendolyn heaved a little sigh.

"I suppose you will be married quite soon now. I shall so miss you!"

"Good child! It is pleasant to think there is somebody who will do that. Yes, I suppose three months now will see me a countess. Long engagements are quite out of date. As for you, my Golden Gwendolyn, I shall make you pay me very long and very frequent visits. I have never indulged in the luxury of a confidante and friend before; and I shall want one more than ever when I am married."

"No, less," said Gwendolyn; "your husband will be your confidant then."

"Ah well, perhaps so. Who can tell?" and Cynthia smiled rather bitterly. "We will hope that your views of life are truer than mine."

"Oh, I hope so. I think when you are once married you will love your husband. I am sure Lord Tremain is very kind and good. Cynthia, if you do not think so yourself, do not marry him."

"I must; I have pledged my word. Besides, I must make a good marriage; and I like Lord Tremain far better than I ever expected to like—well, never mind; I won't shock you needlessly. Keep your own ideas as long as you can. The sooner I am gone the better for every one. Then Mr. Carlingford can have back his favourite curate, which he has been longing to do ever since Reginald left him, and then—"

Cynthia paused. Gwendolyn asked quickly,—

"Do you mean that Mr. Kennedy would come back if you were married?"

"I have little doubt of it. He and Mr. Carlingford are great friends, and peculiarly at one in their views. They are very anxious to work together again. I believe that I, and I only, am the obstacle."

"Well—but," began Gwendolyn with hesitation, "if you have gone away it will not matter to you whether he is here or at Stepney."

"Oh no, it will not matter to me of course. When I am married nothing of that sort can afflict me. I shall go, and he will come, and in the end I suppose he will marry Cicely."

"Cicely!"

"Well, why not? Don't you think she would make an excellent clergyman's wife?"

"Cicely!" repeated Gwendolyn still with astonishment; "why, she didn't care for him too, did she?"

"Cicely was very young in those days, and quite as reserved as she is now. She liked and admired Reginald, and he thought she had a remarkable and original mind. He used to take a good deal of notice of her whilst our engagement lasted. Sometimes he would take me to task for not appreciating her. You know how that sort of thing is likely to end, when I am married and out of the way."

Cynthia spoke with a certain quiet bitterness more distressing to Gwendolyn than any outward lamentations would have been.

"May I say something, Cynthia?"

"Of course you may."

"You won't be offended?"



"No."

"Then if you can't marry Mr. Kennedy yourself, and have in a sort of way agreed to give him up and to marry Lord Tremain, why should you feel it so very much if by-and-by he were to love again and marry? Do you want him to live all his life alone because you cannot marry him?"

"No," answered Cynthia quickly, "I don't. I should be glad to hear that he was happily married—only—only—it would bring it too much home if it were Cicely. Sisters, you will find, Gwendolyn, cannot tolerate each other as rivals. If it were you now, I should not care."

"But why?"

"I cannot give you a reason; I can only state a fact. I should hate for Reginald to marry Cicely."

"But if he could not marry you, how could he marry Cicely? Besides, would she have him?"

"I do not know. We have never made confidantes of each other. I believe she would when she knows him better. Mamma would try to stop it if she could; but then Cicely is strong-minded, and despises the good things of this life, and the opinion of the world, and the petty discomforts of a standing quarrel, which go such a long way with me. Then mamma has never held the same brilliant hopes for Cicely's future as for mine; she has always felt that Cicely would go her own way, in spite of everything. She may even feel glad if she did no worse than marry a clergyman of good family, with some hundreds a year of his own.

With her fortune they would be well off, according to their own ideas."

"Cynthia," said Gwendolyn earnestly, "you don't know how sorry I am for you."

"Oh, don't waste your compassion on such an object. I've made my own bed, and I must lie upon it. I shall have very gay times as Lady Tremain, and can afford to laugh at the fond and foolish romances of youth.—Good-night, Gwendolyn; it is too bad to have kept you talking all this while," and Cynthia rose, kissed her cousin, and vanished into her own room.

Gwendolyn slept only fitfully and restlessly after this interlude, and was relieved when the morning came. She was surprised to find Cynthia down before her; but no allusion was made at the breakfast-table to any event of the previous night. Nobody save Cynthia and her cousin were aware of what had passed.

Breakfast was very late indeed that morning, as the family had been out unusually late upon the previous evening. The clock had struck half-past ten when a ring at the door-bell made Cynthia start slightly, whilst Gwendolyn's face suddenly flushed. No one, however, seemed to observe these signs.

"Lord Tremain is in your study, sir," the man announced to Sir Frederic. "He wishes to speak with you when you are at leisure."

Lady Allardice's face expressed lively feelings of delight and surprise; she glanced affectionately at Cynthia, who looked at Gwendolyn and said,—

"I ordered the pony phaeton for half-past ten. Will

you drive with me? I've got a tiresome headache this morning."

The drive was a silent one. Gwendolyn divined that her companion wished for quiet and leisure of mind, and hardly ten sentences were exchanged between them.

When they had removed their walking-dress and descended to the drawing-room, they were warmly greeted by Lady Allardice, who eagerly advanced to meet them, and folded her daughter in her arms.

"My sweet Cynthia! my darling child! If you did but know how happy you have made me!"

"I can imagine it, mamma," answered Cynthia, disengaging herself, and kneeling before the fire to warm her hands. "I thought you would be pleased."

"My dearest child, I cannot say how rejoiced I am to see your happiness thus secured. If there is a man in the world whose honest goodness of heart and high uprightness of character I can trust, that man is Lord Tremain; and he is one of the few into whose hands I could trust the welfare and happiness of my child without a doubt or a fear."

"Ah, yes," said Cynthia, slowly and softly. "I suppose very few unmarried noblemen have fifty thousand pounds a year."

Lady Allardice took no apparent notice of this observation. She caressed Cynthia's head whilst she continued her eulogy upon Lord Tremain:—

"My child, I could almost envy you your happiness with such a husband—so kind, so good, so noble, and so devotedly attached to yourself. It almost broke me

down to hear him speak of you. There is no purer happiness for a mother than to hear her children praised, and you have always seemed especially *my child*, Cynthia."

Cynthia rose slowly to her feet, rather as if to escape from the maternal caresses.

"Yes, mamma, I think I have learned my lessons well. If I cannot be like you, I can at least strive to act like you, and so, like the good and dutiful little girls in the fairy tales, I am rewarded by the richest of husbands, and can in future dress in cloth of gold, and eat and drink from plates and cups inlaid with priceless gems. It is all just as it should be," and Cynthia sank into a low chair, and gazed with a sweet smile into her mother's face.

"Dear child, you have always been good and dutiful, and I have every reason to be pleased at the brilliant marriage you are going to make. Still, its brilliance is not its great charm in my eyes; it is the sterling goodness of the man."

"Ah yes, I suppose it is. I wonder if Lord Tremain's sterling goodness could stand the test of—"

"And he is coming this afternoon to see you, dearest," cried Lady Allardice with animation. "He wants to talk over a great many things with you. He is most anxious not to wait long. I hope, darling, you will not put obstacles in his way."

"I will marry him next week if he likes," answered Cynthia languidly.

"My sweet child, I knew you would be reasonable—your mother's own daughter. No, no; we must not be

precipitate. I think we must wait over Easter. I should hardly like a wedding in Lent; it might look just a little out of taste. Mr. Carlingford might not quite approve. No; we will wait for Easter, and then it shall be as brilliant as possible. What a thing it will be to look forward to!—Can you fancy our Cynthia a countess, Gwendolyn? Ah, we shall all have to make much of her now, whilst she is with us. I cannot say how pleased I am about this—so different from that little affair with poor Reg—”

“I think we will say no more of that, mamma,” interposed Cynthia quietly and coldly.—“Come, Gwendolyn; there is the luncheon-bell. I will take you down;” and as they descended to the hall, arm in arm, she whispered in a sort of fierce, suppressed tone,—

“Does she wish to make me hate him?”

## CHAPTER XI.

### BERNARD A LOVER.

CYNTHIA'S engagement and brilliant prospects made some little sensation in the Allardices' social circle. It was not a great surprise to onlookers, this consummation of the little drama whose enactment they had watched; and on the whole the world was well pleased at the choice Lord Tremain had made.

Cynthia, if she made few friends, at least made few enemies. She escaped in a wonderful way the spiteful, jealous remarks and cutting sneers which are so lavishly bestowed upon many women who attract a good deal of admiration and remark. Women, as a rule, liked Cynthia, though many amongst them stood a little in awe of her; and she had one great virtue—she never tried to spoil anybody's game out of mischief or undue love of admiration. She never seemed to make any effort to attract or to monopolize admiration; and though she received her due share, she kept on amicable terms with all the world.

Her engagement made a sensation; but as Lord Tremain had always been looked upon as a confirmed

bachelor (people generally forgot that he was a widower), nobody felt personally disappointed by the choice he had made, or grudged Cynthia her brilliant future.

Gwendolyn felt most upon the subject, for she had grown very fond of Cynthia, and was perplexed and distressed by the quiet indifference she evinced upon the important topic of her approaching marriage. However, after a week or ten days of somewhat lively discussion and excitement, the matter seemed to fall into a certain state of quiescence, for there were still three months to elapse before the wedding.

At this time, too, Gwendolyn's own affairs began to occupy more of her thoughts.

The daily routine still continued much in its old fashion. Gwendolyn, Cynthia, and Bernard rode out almost every morning, and on every possible occasion they were joined by Lord Tremain, who certainly paid court to Cynthia in a most devoted fashion. When this happened, it followed, as a matter of course, that the engaged pair rode on together, leaving Gwendolyn and Bernard to entertain each other.

These two were by this time capital friends. Bernard was simple-minded, honest, and manly; not particularly clever, not troubled, like his sisters, by any of life's problems and paradoxes, but cheerful, high-spirited, and genuinely affectionate.

It was a relief to Gwendolyn sometimes to escape from Cicely's quiet bitterness of soul and Cynthia's listless cynicism, and refresh herself by a good long talk with Bernard, who found the world a pleasant

place and his fellow-men capital fellows, and who could enjoy himself and keep up his spirits without troubling himself over imaginary grievances, or a metaphysical analysis of himself or anybody else.

Bernard took people as he found them, and generally accepted them at their own valuation. Thus it was that Lady Allardice was in his eyes a good, unworldly woman, whose advice he was ready to hear dutifully, and whose wishes he would always carry out if possible. In addition to this, Bernard, had taken a warm liking for his cousin Gwendolyn, and was convinced that she was without exception the nicest and the best-looking girl in London.

Thus it was that when Lady Allardice set to work in her own diplomatic way, she found favourable soil in which to sow her seed.

Bernard most certainly ought to marry money if he meant to do anything in the world, and Gwendolyn had a large fortune and a fine estate of her own. But Gwendolyn was very handsome as well as an heiress, and it behoved Bernard to lose no time; for if he let his chance slip, and the girl began to go out into the world, it might be she would think little of the boyish cousin whom she now so cordially liked. It was a thousand pities that Bernard was such a boy, but still time would cure him of the fault; and Lady Allardice set to work with great skill to mould him to her views.

He liked Gwendolyn immensely, but he was not a bit in love. Still he had reached an age when it was not very difficult to make him fancy himself in love, after a



boyish fashion; and when once the idea was put into his mind, it seemed to him a very fine thing to marry his beautiful cousin, and set up for himself in glorious independence.

He knew Gwendolyn was rich; but then he himself was fairly well off, and his father would be prepared to make him a handsome allowance. He had no idea of the disproportion between his wealth and hers, and only realized that between them they would have enough and to spare. They could live in the country and keep hunters, and beyond this point Bernard's ambition did not soar.

Gwendolyn observed that her cousin was unusually attentive at this time, and seemed to seek her out more than ever, and to try on all occasions to institute himself as her especial cavalier. She did not, however, pay much heed to these symptoms, and accepted his services willingly and pleasantly, and she and Bernard certainly became very intimate.

What resulted, however, from this cousinly intimacy was quite a surprise to her.

She was alone one afternoon—for Lady Allardice and her daughters had gone to some fashionable reception—and Gwendolyn had been left to her own devices. It was a dull, cloudy day, and the fire was very bright and warm, and the girl was half dozing over her book in a comfortable chair, not in the least expecting an interruption for some while to come.

She was, however, aroused from her dreamy state by the opening of the door, and looking round, she saw that it was Bernard who had come in.

"Why, Bernard!" she exclaimed in surprise, "what has brought you home at such an untimely hour? Is anything wrong?"

"Oh no; only I got rather bored at the club. You don't mind my coming here?"

"Not at all; I am delighted to have my solitude relieved. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Here comes tea. You are not above that feminine luxury?"

"Not at all; I like it," answered Bernard, stretching out his long limbs towards the pleasant glow of the fire; and by-and-by he said meditatively,—

"This is what I call jolly!"

"I'm glad you find it so much to your mind," said Gwendolyn smiling.

"I always do find everything to my mind when I'm with you, Gwendolyn. I should like always to be like this, just you and me, and nobody else."

She laughed without a shade of embarrassment. She had no notion of what was in his mind.

"Yes, we always took to each other; didn't we, Bruin" (Gwendolyn had adopted Cynthia's pet name by this time), "from the first?"

"Why, yes, to be sure we did. We always liked each other, didn't we? You liked me, Gwendolyn?"

"Of course I did, very much."

"And you like me still, don't you?"

"To be sure I do. Don't get sentimental, Bruin. We are cousins, and very good friends; you know that as well as I do."

"Yes, I know we are cousins and friends; but sometimes I can't help hoping—"

He paused and looked at her; and Gwendolyn smiled, but not quite so readily.

"Well, Bernard, what is it? Have you something on your mind?"

"Yes, I have. Don't be angry with me, Gwendolyn. I can't help it."

"I'm not angry, but—"

"But I must say it. I've been thinking of it such a while. You do like me, don't you, Gwendolyn?"

"You know I do; I've just told you so."

"And I—I love you awfully, Gwendolyn. Do you think you'll ever be able to like me well enough to marry me? There! it's out now. I knew it would have to come. Do say you care for me a little. Do give me a little hope!"

Bernard looked so boyish, and so foolish, and withal so sincere as he made this clumsy attempt at an offer of marriage, that Gwendolyn could not repress a smile.

"But, Bernard—"

"You're not angry!" he cried joyfully. "Oh, I'm glad you're not angry. Do say you'll have me, Gwendolyn. We would have such good times. I do think I could make you very happy if you would only marry me, for I'm so fond of you."

"You're a very good boy, I know, Bernard," answered Gwendolyn, "but you're only a boy still."

"I shall grow older," he answered eagerly, not dis-

puting the point. "I shall grow older every day. If I was married, you'd see the difference directly."

Gwendolyn could not but smile.

"And then, Bernard," she continued, "though I am very fond of you, I do not like you in the right sort of way."

"But you would afterwards—after we were married," he suggested, his face growing grave.

"But I could not marry on the chance of that, Bernard. It would not be right."

Poor Bernard was not an eloquent pleader; he looked very rueful, and sat staring into the fire.

"I say, Gwendolyn," he burst out at length, "let's make a sort of compact."

"What sort of compact, Bernard?"

"Let's just go on as if I hadn't said all this, and you see if you can't get to like me in the right sort of way. You can't be *sure* that you won't in time, can you?"

"Well, no, I can't *be sure* exactly," answered Gwendolyn, in a tone which could hardly be called encouraging. "Still I don't think, Bernard—"

"Oh, don't say any more; let me try. I do think by-and-by, perhaps, you would get to care for me. You'll let me try, won't you?"

"Why, yes, Bernard; of course you can try. Only I think it would be better to try where you have a better chance of success."

But Bernard was in earnest after his youthful fashion, and would not be turned aside from his purpose.

"No!" he said with more manliness; "I love you,

Gwendolyn, and nobody else. I'll try to make you like me if I can; and you won't try *not* to like me, will you?"

"No, of course not;" and Gwendolyn could not forbear a smile. "I should like to be able to give you more encouragement, but it would not be fair."

"And you'll go on just as if nothing had happened? You won't be cold and distant?"

"Oh no."

"And you're not angry with me?"

"No, certainly not; but I think you'd better go away now, and not talk any more about it. We will both try to forget about it."

Gwendolyn hoped and believed that Bernard would soon forget. She saw, with a woman's faultless instinct, that real love was no less lacking to him than to her, and that it was a mere boyish fancy he had taken for herself, founded on a warm cousinly affection, but nothing more. She felt convinced it would soon pass, and did not trouble her head much about the matter, until a second incident, a few days later, brought it more forcibly and less pleasantly to her mind.

Chance led her one morning into Lady Allardice's private room, where her aunt was sitting alone amid her books and papers. Gwendolyn delivered the message with which she came charged, when, somewhat to her surprise, her aunt held out her hand, and drew the girl to her side, whilst she looked up into her face with smiling eyes.

"My dearest child, I have not liked to speak of it

before, but I must just tell you how happy you have made me."

"What? How? I don't understand."

"No? Perhaps I should not have spoken. I know it is a secret; but mothers are privileged, you know, and Bernard—"

Gwendolyn's eyes flashed open now.

"What has Bernard been saying?"

"Nothing which you might not have heard, my sweet Gwendolyn. He only confided to me some of his hopes and fears, and told me you had not quite cast him off—that you had given him room to hope."

"He gave me no choice; besides, he is a mere boy, and he will soon change. One cannot take such an offer as he made *au grand sérieux*."

Lady Allardice smiled and caressed Gwendolyn's hand.

"Just so, dear girl; you have judged wisely and well. He is a boy at present, and you did quite right not to treat the matter too seriously. You are both young in experience, and it is far better not to be precipitate. A sort of mutual understanding, a provisional engagement, is far the best; and you will learn thus more of each other, and find, I believe, that Bernard is more of the man and less of the boy than you fancy."

"But there is no engagement whatever," said Gwendolyn quickly.

"No, dear girl; I quite understand, and I quite approve. I should be sorry to see any haste or thoughtlessness in so serious a matter. But my dear boy's

heart is so bound up in the hope, that you cannot wonder if I do build my little castles on rather insecure foundations."

Gwendolyn would have withdrawn her hand, but found it held too fast. She always tried to like and trust her aunt, but she was continually finding that she had failed. She tried to smile, and although the effort was not very successful it greatly pleased Lady Allardice.

"Now, I must not talk to you any more, I see, or I shall be breaking my resolution and become a pleader for my boy's happiness, which, of course, I ought not to be. No doubt in time he will plead successfully for himself; and meantime, my sweet child, let me thank you sincerely for the small vantage-ground you have given to dear Bernard. It is not wise to encourage young men too much, but a little hope held out from the first is such an incentive. I believe that is all our dear boy wants to make a man of him. You will yet see the day, I am convinced, when you will be proud of your own handiwork."

"Indeed I have done nothing—" began Gwendolyn; but Lady Allardice playfully cut her short.

"Don't tell me you have done nothing, my sweet Gwendolyn, because I know better. You have been like a good fairy ever since you entered these doors. First you win the heart of our dearest Cynthia, and from you she borrows just that touch of softness which is all she lacked, and which has now won the heart of Lord Tremain; and now your unconscious witchery is stealing away my boy's heart too, and turning him into

a man for your sweet sake. Gwendolyn, my dear, you may some day be a mother and taste a mother's hopes and fears. You will then understand better than you can do now why it is that I feel so deeply thankful to see my Bernard's affections set upon a good and noble woman, who will learn in time to value him at his true worth—why I thank you so sincerely for your patience and your goodness, which will, I am sure, result in the highest good for him and for you. Go now, dearest. I have perhaps said too much ; but you will not misunderstand."

Gwendolyn felt that she did not even understand. She was puzzled and uneasy, and took an early opportunity of consulting Cynthia upon what had passed.

Cynthia's face grew grave, and her short upper lip curled disdainfully.

"Oh, so that is the game, is it? What a shame it is, and you so young and helpless. Gwendolyn, you will have to be very careful."

"Why?"

"Because if you do not act with the utmost caution, you will find yourself hemmed in, and bound to Bruin by a tacit engagement, too impalpable to break, but too strong to resist. I know what mamma can do in that way, and I bid you beware. Bernard has next to nothing ; you are an heiress : you see the inducement."

"But I am not engaged, and she knows it as well as I do. I don't believe I shall ever care for Bernard ; and she can't make me marry him."



"She can do almost anything she sets her mind to," answered Cynthia significantly. "You must beware."

Gwendolyn looked distressed and helpless.

"What can I do?"

"Be on your guard, and distrust her. Make no admissions, and keep away from Bernard. When I am married I shall be able to help you."

Gwendolyn shut herself up in her room. Her Bible, her father's last gift, lay on the little table. For many weeks she had hardly thought of it, but now she burst into bitter tears at the sight.

"Oh, what a miserable, hollow world it is! Every one set against every one else—nothing but self-seeking, and a race after wealth or power! Oh, is this really all? Is there nothing good behind? Is all religion hollow show like—like Aunt—but no; I ought not to think such things. But if there is light in the world, why cannot I find it?"

## CHAPTER XII.

### GWENDOLYN SEEKS HAPPINESS.

A TIME of spiritual darkness and great mental depression followed at this time for Gwendolyn.

Since her arrival at her aunt's house everything had been too strange, the life there too much of a novelty, to leave her thoughts free for other matters. But she had grown used now to the daily routine. She was not particularly interested in the programme; and she could not resist the feelings of loneliness and sorrow which began to steal over her.

Gwendolyn had always been given to high ideals. She had believed in what was high and holy, and had indulged in aspirations about her own life which she had hoped some day to fulfil.

What had become of these aspirations now? What had become of the lofty ideals? Gwendolyn asked herself these questions with a shudder of bitter disappointment. A dismal answer was forcing itself upon her reluctant mind:—Ideals were chimerical, aspirations childish folly. In the world it was impossible to realize either the one or the other.

And happiness? Was that too a myth—an impossible, ideal state, hopelessly unattainable?

Gwendolyn watched the people about her, and saw many of them gay, many of them lively, many of them apparently satisfied and at ease; but were they really happy? At times they certainly seemed so; but then a remark would drop from one or another—a caustic, cynical remark, which seemed equivalent to a denial of any lasting state of happiness.

After many days of quiet observation, Gwendolyn came to the conclusion that the only really happy person of her acquaintance was Bertie Heron. An impulse came over her one day to tax him with her discovery.

"Happy?" repeated young Heron with a sunny smile in his eyes. "To be sure I am. Is there any reason why I should be otherwise?"

"I don't think most people are. I am not happy here, and that has set me thinking. I have been looking round, and I can't find any one whom I call really happy, unless it be you, and I want to find out how it is. Can you help me?"

Bertie's face grew grave, and a curious, serious look began to shine out of his merry brown eyes.

"I believe I could tell you—partly," he said slowly; "but you would think it very odd. It's not the fashion to talk about such things now-a-days."

"Never mind fashion, Bertie; I am sick of fashion. If you know the truth, do tell it me."

Gwendolyn's face looked pale and anxious; a wistful

light was in her dark eyes. Bertie looked down at her, and then he came inside her recess and drew the curtain across it. Other people were laughing and chattering in the room, but practically those two were alone.

"Now," said Gwendolyn, drawing a long breath, "tell me."

"I am to tell you why it is that people do not seem to be happy?"

"Yes."

"I believe it is because they do not set about it in the right way."

"How?"

"Well, look here; I'll give you a bit of a parable to illustrate what I mean. Suppose a father has a family of children: he wants them to be happy, doesn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And he gives them what is necessary to them to make them happy, doesn't he?"

"A good father does."

"Yes; I am speaking of a good father. Well, he does all this; but, at the same time, he lays down certain rules which are to be observed. He does not permit unlimited license or absolute independence."

"Of course not."

"And he looks for obedience, and love, and reverence from the children whom he loves and cares for."

"Yes, of course; go on."

"Well, those children, as we have said, have every cause to be happy. But suppose their first object in life is to forget all about their father, break his rules when-

ever they do not quite fit in with their own views, and go on altogether as if they had no father ; go on in fact until they actually deny their father's existence, as well as defy his authority. Do you think, then, that they will be very happy ?”

“ No,” answered Gwendolyn.

She said no more, only looked earnestly at Bertie, who was not looking at her, and whose face was slightly flushed, as if it was a little effort to him to make this speech. Her eyes asked the question that her lips did not utter ; and the answer was spoken with a little nervous haste :—

“ Well, you see, I believe it's all just there. We've all got a Father in God, who takes care of us and wishes us to be happy ; and the first thing we do is to try to forget all about him and his gifts and his rules, and be happy in our own way. It isn't likely that we shall succeed.”

Gwendolyn was intensely surprised to hear a young man of the world like Bertie Heron talking in this way ; but it was as much of a relief as a surprise. She had begun to wonder if any thoughts of sacred things ever did enter people's heads.

“ Are you religious ?” she asked simply.

“ ‘ Religious ’ is a word I object to,” he answered. “ It may mean anything or nothing, and it has a cold, unmeaning sound about it ; but if you mean, do I believe in God—Father, Son, and Spirit ?—I answer most emphatically, I do.”

“ And is it that belief that makes you happy ?”

"I feel as if I should be very miserable without it."

Gwendolyn sighed, and said by-and-by, "I suppose, in a way, I *believe* too; but that does not seem enough. Things are not living realities to me, only names and symbols. I want to feel different, and I cannot. What makes the difference between us? Who taught you to feel as you do?"

"My mother," answered the young man, and his whole face changed as he reverently spoke the name,—  
"my mother. It is to her I owe all that I possess—all the happiness I enjoy. Gwendolyn, I had that most rare of all blessings, a good mother, with whom I was on terms of the most perfect sympathy. Many good mothers never win their children's confidence. They are over-anxious to instruct; they overwhelm them with good advice and with religious instruction; they try to force their confidence, and so utterly exclude themselves from it. I have seen instances without number of such results. I have seen sons and daughters, too, driven far on the way to scepticism by the energy and fervour with which their parents tried to force upon them their own religious opinions. My mother fell into no such error. I was never conscious of being 'talked to,' much less of being 'talked at.' I never had to draw in for fear of being drawn out. If I was led, it was so gently, so imperceptibly that I was unconscious of the leading. When I was taught I was almost unconscious of the teaching. It seemed to me that I was the one who talked, and preached, and theorized; my mother the one who listened, and sympathized, and moulded my

thoughts without my knowledge. My mother was a saintly woman, and I just worshipped her."

"Is she dead?" asked Gwendolyn softly.

"Yes, she died three years ago; but I had grown to manhood by that time. I do not feel as though I should ever be tempted to throw off the influence she threw around me."

"It helps you still, thinking of her?"

"Yes. Every day I begin by resolving to do nothing she would be ashamed to see me do, to say nothing that it would pain her to hear. That was my resolve during her lifetime: now that she is dead, I think I feel it more binding than ever; and now I have to add this --not to *think* what she would grieve to have me think. It may be my fancy, but I cannot help feeling that she is watching over me now, and has a better knowledge than before of what I say and do and think."

The young man was speaking dreamily now, and Gwendolyn was a good deal impressed by his straightforward simplicity, which was very different from anything she had come across before.

"May I ask you some more questions? I have never talked like this to anybody before."

"No; one does not talk, as a rule, in so serious a strain. It does no good to one's cause to try to force it down where it is not wanted; that seems to me practically to do more harm than good. But one never ought to be ashamed of one's colours, or shrink from speaking out, when silence would perhaps give assent to what it would be wrong to assent to. I have found that a little

boldness when the right time comes is never taken amiss. Some fellows laugh at my 'notions,' and think me old-fashioned and eccentric; but so far as I know I have never made an enemy yet, and I have made many friends in unexpected quarters."

"That is just what I wanted to speak about," said Gwendolyn quickly. "It seems to me as if it would be impossible to go on living this sort of life, if—if one really was in earnest and wanted to think of other things and be religious. I can't think how you manage to do both. I feel as if I should have to get somewhere right away before I could even try to be different."

"Then don't think that any more," cried Bertie quickly and earnestly; "it is such a mistake, and a mistake which does and will do a great deal of harm. Can't you see what an acknowledgment of weakness it is, if we show that our religion isn't strong enough for daily wear in that state of life where we have been placed? Some of us are born to move in what is called 'the fashionable world' and to mix in society. Well, you may be quite sure we are not placed there for nothing; and if, as soon as we receive any serious impressions and wish to follow what is higher and better than a good deal around us, we say that we must leave our own position and get away into some retreat or seclusion more favourable to the growth of such aspirations, is it not a sad avowal of weakness? Is it not as good as saying that God isn't strong enough to help us; that the world is more powerful than his word; that we, in fact, can neither trust him nor believe in him, even



though he says, 'Be not afraid; I have overcome the world,' and most emphatically states that his wish is not that we should be taken out of the world, but that we should be kept from the evil?"

Bertie spoke with a frank earnestness which went far to carry conviction to his hearer; but still Gwendolyn could not quite grasp his point.

"I should have thought that a man like you would not be content to go on as you do, without any regular occupation, spending so much of your time in people's drawing-rooms. It doesn't seem to me quite a right sort of life. Why don't you go into the Church, for instance?"

"I have never felt the call without which I do not feel I ought to take up a clergyman's life; and then, Gwendolyn, I am not setting up my life as a model—far from it. I know that there is very much that might be amended in it. But my mother's failing health absorbed all my time and energies for the last three years of her life; and then my own health gave way for a considerable time; so that I have not been able to take up a regular profession like other men, even had I felt a natural calling to any. But you need not suppose that I have on that account been altogether idle. Under Mr. Carlingford's direction, I have managed to do some small share of work for our less happy fellow-creatures."

"Mr. Carlingford," repeated Gwendolyn quickly. "Oh yes, you go to our church, don't you? Do you like it? Do you like him?"

"He is a very noble man, and one of the best clergymen I have ever met. Yes, I do like him, and his church, and his ways, and everything."

Gwendolyn was silent; her companion seemed to divine her thoughts. He said slowly,—

"You must not condemn a man or a system because you see people following it in a half-hearted way, merely because it happens to have attained a certain amount of fashionable popularity. As reasonably might you condemn Christianity itself."

"Cicely is in earnest; she is not half-hearted; she despises fashion. But she finds it all a hollow show," said Gwendolyn in a low voice. "And Aunt Allardice—"

"Excuse me, Gwendolyn, but I can't discuss your aunt and your cousins with you; it would not be right. But I think I may say to you what I have often said to Cicely herself, that if she would be half as much in earnest to find the solid ground that lies under what seems to her hollow show, as she is to pick holes in the system, and try to find all the weak places without which no system can altogether escape, she would be a much wiser and happier woman."

Gwendolyn sat in silent thought.

"It seems plain and easy enough to you; but you have been taught. I never have. My father was a very reserved man, and my mother I cannot even remember. I don't feel as if I had any groundwork to build upon."

Bertie looked sympathetic but perplexed. He felt it

was not for him to put himself in the position of teacher to this lonely girl.

"You had better talk to Mr. Carlingford, Gwendolyn. He will understand you better than I can. He is the right man to go to."

"Yes, I suppose so; everybody tells me that. I shall have to talk to him soon, for I have not been confirmed yet, and he is going to prepare me. I believe Aunt Allardice has spoken to him about it already."

The conference was broken up now; but Gwendolyn did not forget it. Still she only seemed to feel more and more painfully her own coldness of heart and unbelief. It seemed impossible that religion could ever become a living reality to her. So far it was only a dry, formal creed, which never penetrated to the recesses of her heart.

It was in this weary, callous state that she first found herself face to face with Mr. Carlingford.

"I hear you wish to be confirmed, Miss Maltby."

"Yes, if you consider me fit. I have not been much taught," explained Gwendolyn listlessly; "but I have learned the Catechism. My cousin told me that was necessary," and she trembled inwardly lest he should at once put her through her duty to her neighbour.

Mr. Carlingford, however, was looking at her face, not at the prayer-book she held out. Gwendolyn's eyes fell before his kindly yet piercing gaze.

"We will take the Catechism on trust, Miss Maltby. I am more interested in other matters. In the first place, your face tells me that you are not happy."

"Is any one happy?" There was a touch of bitterness in the tone not natural in one so young.

"Happiness is comparative. Perfect happiness is denied to us in this life; but to every one of us the gracious possibility is extended of being really and truly happy, even in this present world."

"I suppose good people are happy in their own way; but I am not good."

"Will you kindly explain to me what you mean by that word 'good'?"

"I suppose I meant religious."

"And now explain your definition of 'religious.'"

Gwendolyn was silent.

"Try, Miss Maltby, if you please. If we begin by clothing our thoughts with vague words without any determinate meaning, we cannot expect to arrive at any mutual understanding."

Gwendolyn pondered awhile, and then said with hesitation,—

"I suppose I mean people who love God and trust him, and try to do what he wishes."

"Very good; that is more easy of comprehension. Your definition is not amiss, so far as it goes; but let us return to our first proposition. You say you are not religious yourself. Does that mean that you do not love nor trust God?"

Gwendolyn's eyes fell. She knew not what to say. Would he think her a heathen, and decline to have any more dealings with her?

"Miss Maltby," said Mr. Carlingford earnestly, "your

silence is your answer ; and I am glad that no sense of false shame stands between you and the truth. However sad a truth may be, there is nothing like open avowal and honest facing of it to get things put right. Can you tell me at all how it is that you do not love God ? ”

“ No ; I suppose I must be very wicked, for I do try hard.”

“ Now I am going to ask you a difficult question. Can you tell me how you set about trying to love God ? Can you give me any insight into the working of your mind ? ”

After a long pause, Gwendolyn tried to frame an answer,—

“ I try to think about him,” she answered slowly,—“ of his majesty and glory. I try to believe that he loves us, and likes us to love him ; but I can’t say that my efforts are very successful.”

“ No ; I think you are hardly upon the right tack yet. Do you know that there is only one way by which we can approach God ? ”

“ And what is that ? ”

“ The one way is the living way—through his Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.”

“ I have heard people talk like that before,” said Gwendolyn sighing ; “ but, to tell the truth, it does not convey much meaning to my mind.”

“ No ? I am glad you have told me so. We will begin in another way. I have not time to stay to-day. I came because I would not break my appointment ;

but I am on my way to a sick man, and I must not linger. But before I go, I am going to ask you to do something. Read in your Bible the main facts in the life of Christ. Read them as you would read an ordinary history, and try as far as possible to picture to yourself the times, and to realize, in a practical way, the effect of such teaching at such a time. If you feel inclined to take the trouble, read the contemporaneous history of other nations; in any case, do all you can to picture the times, and to bring home to yourself that you are reading a real history of a real Man. Some people are afraid of taking Bible narratives in too practical and matter-of-fact a way. This is a great mistake. The Bible is the most practical book in the world, and the gospel narratives cannot be too literally accepted. They were written by plain men for plain people, and are simple unvarnished facts, which the fact of their inspiration does not in any way lessen. Read them in this spirit, and try to take in the plain, simple meaning of a life which is a matter of history as well as of religion. When I see you next, we will talk of the impressions you have received. Till then good-bye, and may God Almighty bless and teach you."

The last words, so suddenly solemn, robbed Gwendolyn of any power to reply, and Mr. Carlingford had gone before she had found her voice again.

This first interview with the clergyman had not been at all what she had expected. She hardly knew if she were pleased or disappointed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### GWENDOLYN FINDS HAPPINESS.

"WELL, Miss Maltby, have you done as I asked?"

"Yes, Mr. Carlingford."

"And with what result?"

"I hardly know. I have been very much interested."

"Well, that is something, at any rate. From what I gather in reference to your past history, you are not as familiar as many of us are, at your age, with Biblical facts."

"No, I am very ignorant," answered Gwendolyn humbly; "I hardly know anything."

"Sometimes ignorance is more easy to deal with than excessive familiarity," answered Mr. Carlingford encouragingly. "Tell me now the result produced upon your mind by the study I set you. In plain words, what did you think of Christ after reading his life dispassionately and as a matter of history? Answer me frankly and truthfully. Do not be afraid to say exactly what you think."

"I think he is the most wonderful man that ever lived," she answered slowly.

"Yes? So far so good; but tell me further what you thought of his character."

"Oh, he was good!" cried Gwendolyn earnestly, "wonderfully, wonderfully good!"

"Yes; and anything else?"

Gwendolyn looked up inquiringly.

"What about his divinity? Were you convinced that he was the Son of God?"

"I—I suppose so."

"I want no suppositions. I want conviction founded on downright reasoning from facts. Did the facts of his life, together with his teaching, convince your reason as well as your sensibilities? Can you say from the bottom of your heart, 'I *know* that my Redeemer liveth'? If he is not the Son of God, he is not your Redeemer."

Gwendolyn was silent.

"Ah!" said Mr. Carlingford, after a significant pause, "now, Miss Maltby, you have committed yourself to a paradox, and you must face it boldly, and try to find your own way out of the difficulty."

"What difficulty?" asked Gwendolyn with interest.

"I will explain. You tell me that your study has convinced you that Christ was a most wonderful man, and most wonderfully good; but Christ claimed to be the Son of God, and if you are not convinced that he was so, you must believe him to be an impostor. If an impostor, he was the most blasphemous and wicked impostor that ever existed. How can you then call him good?"



Gwendolyn was silent awhile, and then said slowly,—

“He was good, most wonderfully good. How could he have done and said all he did if he had not been so?”

“Ah! how indeed? But that is a question you have to answer, not I. Your reason is not absolutely convinced of the divinity of Christ, although you are, it seems, willing to take it on trust. There is a great deal we must take on trust, Miss Maltby; but there also is, thank God, a very great deal which we can reason out for ourselves. The Godhead of Christ is a point on which our judgment and reason can absolutely convince us; and I wish you by patient thought to convince yourself of it, or else to face this inevitable conclusion, that Christ was a blasphemous impostor and an arch-deceiver.”

“It sounds so dreadful to say such things!”

“It does; but it is better even to shock our ears with plain words than to delude our senses by shirking to give utterance to what we think, or to avoid following up our own premises to their logical conclusions. There is nothing so effective for getting rid of ugly thoughts as giving them utterance in words, and seeing what they really mean; nothing so good for cleaning out dark corners as letting the light shine into them, and seeing what we have got concealed there. You must face boldly the doubt you have got hidden away in your mind, and find out whether you really believe Christ to be the Son of God or an impostor. You have no other way out of it.”

Gwendolyn sat silent, and by-and-by Mr. Carlingford continued,—

“I do not imagine the doubt you have expressed has been put into your head by any Unitarian literature which has come in your way, but perhaps it is only fair to tell you of an ingenious way in which that school tries to slip out of its paradoxical position. They say that Christ was a good man, but not God; and they get over the difficulty of the imposition by saying that he was a dreamer and an enthusiast, deceiving, but self-deceived, and therefore not responsible. This seems to me a very shallow notion, and one which will not admit of close analysis. The whole nature and teaching of Christ, as well as his life, show so clearly the practical thoughts of a man living amongst men; living for the thirty years previous to his ministry, so far as we can gather, just the same kind of life that his countrymen and fellow-men led. Had it been otherwise, we should have been told, as we were told in the case of John the Baptist; besides, in all allusions to his early life, and in the comments made by his relatives after his work began, it is evident that he had lived amongst them as a simple village carpenter, and had never separated himself from them or led them to believe that he was about to do great things. It is not from antecedents like these that enthusiast impostors emerge. The world's great dreamers and prophets have lived apart, fasting and keeping under all natural emotions; have seen visions and dreamed dreams; brought themselves gradually into notice, and so collected a small band of followers, which

has gradually swelled into greater or less numbers according to circumstances.

"But our Lord did not do anything like that. Christ did not by austere rigour so reduce himself that the balance of the mind was destroyed, and he could picture himself anything he chose. He calmly emerged from his quiet home and announced himself the Son of God, which announcement was corroborated by John at Jordan, and verified by God himself from heaven. The calm beauty of his teaching shows that his words are not those of a blind enthusiast, and its cohesion and consistency are almost proof in themselves of its divine origin, considering the state of men's minds and intellects at that time.

"Then, again, I have heard another argument—but this is such a poor and shallow one as hardly to merit consideration—that the evangelists themselves were dreamers and enthusiasts, so carried away by the teaching of their Master that they imputed to him a divinity he never claimed for himself. To such a notion I can only say that its refutation will most surely be found in the simple clearness of the gospels and in their marvellous agreement. To me it seems too poor and childish an argument to be worth overmuch consideration. Could a religion founded on a disciple's error ever live as Christianity has done?

"Well, Miss Maltby, I have by no means exhausted my opponents' arguments; they are many and subtle, though, as I unhesitatingly affirm, both illogical and inconclusive; but I have said enough to give you

a little insight into the matter. Now I must leave you again, with this problem to solve, Is Christ the Son of God, or an impostor? for there is no middle course open to you. The answer is to be found in the pages of your Bible. A commentary may be a help to you now, showing you the marked fulfilment of prophecy in the coming of Christ, and the peculiar force and reason of much that the New Testament tells us. Set your mind to the task, and do not be afraid of doubt. Grapple boldly with it until you have overcome it, and remember it is fatal to shirk or to temporize with such a foe."

And so ended Gwendolyn's second interview preparatory to her confirmation.

"I like Mr. Carlingford," she said to herself; "but it seems quite shocking to have still to make up my mind if I am a Christian or not. I wonder he is not quite horrified at me."

She would have been still more surprised had she been able to read Mr. Carlingford's thoughts as he turned away from the door:—

"Thank God for honest doubt and humble determination to struggle after the truth. If those two unhappy girls, her cousins, would honestly admit their doubts and fears, and give one the chance to lay them to rest, they might be happy and useful women. Ah, me! it is the old, old story of the Pharisee and the publican. Not that those poor girls are in any way self-righteous; but they have so wrapped themselves round with morbid reserve, so sheltered themselves behind forms and usages, which are

only good when they are the outcome of a deeper feeling beneath, that it passes my strength to touch their hearts or win their confidence. May God Almighty himself reveal himself to them. Perhaps this simple-minded girl, with her honest yearnings and honest doubts, may do much for them in time."

Gwendolyn did not talk to Cynthia or Cicely about her interviews with Mr. Carlingford, or try to win their sympathy or assistance in her doubt and perplexity. Perhaps she felt to do so would be useless. Perhaps she dreaded the effect of their words upon herself. However that may be, she certainly lived her life a good deal alone at this juncture, and the absence of Cynthia on a visit to some of her future husband's relatives gave her ample leisure and solitude to pursue her studies.

When Mr. Carlingford came the next week, she had her answer ready.

"I am quite sure," she said simply and reverently, "that Christ was the Son of God."

"Your reason is convinced as well as your feelings? What you were willing to take upon trust, you can now feel to be an assured fact, of which intellectual reasoning has convinced you?"

"Yes. I have read and thought a great deal, and I am quite sure. No one but God *could* have lived the life that Christ led. If he had not been God, his death would have been an idle mockery, instead of the most sublime and wonderful event that ever has happened or ever could happen. Oh yes, Mr. Carlingford, indeed

I do know now that Christ is my Saviour and my God."

Gwendolyn's face was full of feeling. She had forgotten in her earnestness her reserve and her doubt. She spoke from the bottom of her heart, and the clergyman uttered a fervent,—

"Thank God!"

After a while he asked gently,—

"And how about that old question of happiness? Has this discovery of yours thrown any light upon that point?"

"It has made me happy," answered Gwendolyn. "Sometimes I am very happy. I do not think I can ever again feel so lonely or dissatisfied as I did, because I know now that Christ loves me."

"You think that now you will never be assailed by doubt or troubled by fear?"

"I am sure I shall never doubt again," answered Gwendolyn smiling brightly. "It is all too clear. I do not think I could lose my grasp now."

The clergyman smiled, yet there was a tinge of sadness in the smile.

"Far be it from me to discourage you, my child, especially at such a time as this, when you are to be so soon admitted to that most sacred fellowship our Saviour has instituted as a bond between him and his Church here below, and to receive the help and strength which he always bestows upon those who humbly and reverently partake of the communion of his body and blood; but yet I cannot but warn you."

"Warn me of what?"

"That you have an uphill path before you; that you will be assailed by a thousand doubts and fears before you have proceeded far along the narrow way; that Satan will himself do all he can to hinder you, and to regain the ground in your heart that he has lost. This time of calm and happiness cannot last. I think such moments are given us as preparation for what is to come—to give us a mead of rest and help in order to refresh us for the struggle of life. I warn you of this now, so that when the hour of trial comes, as come it must, you will be the better prepared for it."

"Thank you for telling me. I will be on my guard; but I do not feel as if anything could ever shake me now."

Gwendolyn smiled tranquilly, and the clergyman sighed even whilst he smiled back.

He would not too greatly discourage her. He would not tell her then that her victory had been all too easily won; that not in days or weeks could that calm assurance be attained, which she fancied she had reached already; that her soul was like a bark sailing on a halcyon sea before a fair breeze, but not on that account prepared to weather the storm which must sooner or later lash the sunny sea into fury. No, it was not his duty then to try and force conviction upon her. Let her enjoy for a while the serene security she was now feeling. Perhaps such a time of repose would fit her better than anything else for the tempests that must come later on.

Gwendolyn was very happy, peacefully happy, at this time. She was left almost entirely alone, and nothing came to disturb the peaceful current of her thoughts. Cynthia was away, Bernard was away, Lady Allardice's time and thoughts were almost entirely occupied by her daughter's approaching marriage. Cicely was absorbed by her studies, her charities, and her Lenten church-going.

Gwendolyn was thus left alone to enjoy in solitude the happiness of her newly-found faith. There was much of enthusiasm and poetry in the girl's composition, a good deal of the mystic and the dreamer in her mental calibre. Mr. Carlingford had suspected this, and had tried to guard against the dangers which beset such natures; but his visits were necessarily few, and the time Gwendolyn spent in meditation very great, and it could hardly be possible for her to escape the almost perilous fervour of devotion which brings so much happiness at the time, but which, if not thoroughly and soundly rooted in something far more lasting than mere feeling, is only too apt to leave behind a bitterness and emptiness of soul which is the more keenly felt because of what went before.

But no such doubts or fears assailed Gwendolyn now. Her confirmation was a time of deep, solemn happiness to her; and the Christian vows were spoken by her with an earnestness of soul which seemed as if it must compel fulfilment.

Her first communion, too, in the dim, quiet church in the early morning hours, brought with it a sense of



hallowed peace and protection like nothing she had ever experienced before.

When Gwendolyn returned to the ordinary routine of her life in her aunt's house, she felt that the victory was won, that happiness was secured, and that nothing could ever again greatly disturb her peace of mind.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CYNTHIA'S BALL.

"OH yes, Gwendolyn, of course you must appear."

"At a big dance, Cynthia?"

"Yes, to be sure, when it is given at our house. Now I won't have you silly and tiresome. You may dance or not as you please, but appear you must. It is *my* party, you know, Gwendolyn—the last party in this house where I shall ever appear as Miss Allardice. I mean you to be there, Gwendolyn, so let me hear no more about it. I have too much on my mind just now to stand contradiction."

Gwendolyn smiled. She knew that Cynthia would have her way; and she yielded without any further opposition. She would not herself quite like to be absent at her cousin's farewell reception before her marriage.

The Easter recess had come and gone, and the whirl of the London season was commencing. Already Gwendolyn's leisure seemed over, and she felt herself drawn into a vortex from which at present she saw no reason to wish to free herself. Cynthia, in her playful, im-

perious way, claimed a large share of her time and attention.

Cynthia's wedding was to take place during the third week in May, and now it was only three weeks distant. Gwendolyn was her cousin's chosen companion during the busy days which of necessity preceded such an event, and had been deeply absorbed and interested by the purchase of the trousseau, as she was now by the arrival and the unpacking of various wedding presents which began at this time to come in.

After many weeks of comparative solitude and much meditation, Gwendolyn entered with much natural girlish zest into matters of this kind, although she by no means put aside all serious thought, nor did her newly-found happiness desert her.

Cynthia was serene, indifferent, and languid during these weeks of preparation. She received congratulations with a smile that might mean anything or nothing; looked at her presents with calm scrutiny, seldom saying anything beyond, "Very pretty," "Extremely handsome," or "Very kind, I am sure." She was particular, nay, even fastidious, in the matter of her trousseau, but rather, as it seemed, because her artistic taste in dress was peculiarly critical than because she took any special pride or pleasure in the purchases.

Gwendolyn could not find out that she was unhappy. She neither brooded nor grieved nor complained; but she seemed to have no bright anticipations, no natural alternations of sorrow and joy, hope and fear; she seemed throughout calmly and gently indifferent.

Her determination for Gwendolyn to appear at her farewell reception, and to be one of her bridesmaids, roused her to greater animation than she had yet shown over anything; and she had in each instance won a victory over Gwendolyn's scruples of propriety. These scruples were of a somewhat perfunctory nature; for the girl sincerely loved her cousin, and had a great wish to do her bidding and to be all she could to her, and the memory of her dead father was growing dim in this new life and surroundings so strangely different from anything she had known during his lifetime.

She even consented to wear white crape upon the night of the dance, with a good deal of black jet and ribbon to make it compatible with mourning garb. The dress suited her well. It showed off to advantage the graceful proportions of her figure, her delicately fair complexion, and her shining golden hair. She was conscious that she was beautiful as she looked in her mirror arrayed in her snowy robes; and this consciousness brought with it a curious thrill of pleasure and of power. Then her heart suddenly smote her. Was she even now forgetting the vow she had lately registered—to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world? Was she doing anything which could look like a slight upon the memory of her dead father?

But she knew that her father would be the first to bid her follow the impulse of her nature and gratify her cousin; and she knew too that there was no sin in fulfilling social claims which belonged to the station of life in which God had placed her, if only they were

fulfilled in the right spirit—in Christian humility and gentleness.

"Not to be taken out of the world, but to be kept from the evil," said Gwendolyn to herself. "I must not forget that. I must always pray to be kept from the evil."

She opened her Bible and read a few verses, and then went in to her cousin's room.

"Ah, my Golden Gwendolyn, I knew I should be proud of you to-night. You must always let me design your dresses for you. You look like Titania herself to-night."

"It is a pretty dress, Cynthia, and so is yours; you are splendid."

There was some truth in Gwendolyn's remark. Cynthia, in her sheeny satin and rich lace, looked magnificently handsome, with that singularity and originality in her artistic costume which was peculiarly her own. Graceful, indifferent, cold, serene, there was something characteristic and remarkable about Cynthia which made it impossible that she should not attract notice and admiration from every one who saw her. To-night this was especially the case; she had never, even in the days of her girlish bloom, looked half so striking as she did on the evening of her last reception previous to her marriage.

"Diamonds!" exclaimed Gwendolyn, as with a slight movement fire seemed to flash from Cynthia's head. "O Cynthia, what diamonds!"

"Lord Tremain's present. I told him he should keep

them for the eighteenth, but he would not. There are plenty more family jewels for me later, he said, and he wished me to have these now and wear them to-night."

"How proud he will be of you!" said Gwendolyn, with an admiring look at her cousin. "He is very proud of you, Cynthia, and loves you most devotedly."

"Yes, that is almost the worst of it," answered Cynthia, as she clasped a sparkling circlet round her neck. "I am not sure that I have not made a mistake in taking a man so good and so much in earnest."

"What do you mean, Cynthia?"

"Fashionable marriages should be made in the fashionable way—so much money against so much beauty or wit, or whatever happens to be the stock-in-trade. When a vast amount of affection and devotion is thrown in extra, it destroys the balance and complicates matters. If Lord Tremain were an ordinary young man of the period, I could snub him; as it is, I can't."

"Why should you snub him?"

"I always snub men who talk sentiment to me. I loathe it, and I tell them so, and I seldom am troubled a second time. Lord Tremain is an old man, and he really does love me, for some mysterious reason which I cannot fathom; and moreover I shall be his wife in a few weeks' time. Some hidden power restrains me from speaking openly to him, and I merely sit still and look sweet and pensive. He thinks I like it, and I feel a hypocrite. Well, I suppose things will right themselves when we are married. Love-making will soon cease then of its own accord."

Gwendolyn looked wistful and appealing, but there was no time then for further discussion. Wheels had already stopped at the door, and Cynthia had to hasten down to receive her guests.

It was a brilliant evening; of that there could be no two opinions. It was by far the most splendid ball that Gwendolyn had ever witnessed. Lady Allardice had spared no expense and no trouble, and she was certainly repaid by the result.

Gwendolyn felt as if she had entered a sort of dream-land. She hardly knew the rooms which her hands had helped to decorate earlier in the day, now that she saw them brilliantly and artistically lighted, and crowded with guests whose costumes seemed each one more beautiful and rich than the last.

The girl would not dance. She preferred to wander about watching what went on. There was dancing in the large drawing-room, whilst talking and the receiving of guests went on in the one adjoining, and ices were served in the little boudoir.

Cynthia was dancing at last, with Bertie Heron, and Lord Tremain was proudly watching the graceful, well-matched pair, as they glided smoothly amid the throng to the dreamy music of a waltz.

Gwendolyn sat down on one of the rout-seats that lined the wall to watch too.

Presently she was aware that her view was intercepted by a tall black figure, and looking up she saw Sir Kenrick Dalrymple.

"I have been trying to get near you all the evening,

Miss Maltby, but you seemed to elude me like a spirit. I have only caught glimpses of you at a distance. Are you not dancing this? May I have the pleasure?"

"I am not dancing to-night at all, thank you; but I can find you a partner directly if you want one."

"No thanks; I want you," and Sir Kenrick seated himself beside her, and possessed himself of her fan, which he wielded, for her benefit, with the skill of long practice. "Tell me how you like the busy rush of a London season. Is it a first experience?"

"Practically so, though I did spend a month in town one June many years ago. I did not understand or enjoy things then; it all seemed a whirl and a rush. I like this experience better."

"That is well. I like people to enjoy themselves. There is a great deal that is good and pleasant even in this despised world of ours. Have you begun to find this out yet?"

"Yes," answered Gwendolyn with a smile. "I am beginning to analyze now. I was too confused at first to do so. I tried to lay down hard and fast lines, and make out everything good or bad. I did not understand how much the two are mixed up together. I had seen so little of life before."

Gwendolyn and Sir Kenrick were on fairly intimate terms now. He came often to the house, and she met him not unfrequently at other houses, and he always seemed to seek her out and to take pleasure in her society. The pleasure was mutual. Gwendolyn was interested in the rather melancholy young baronet, and



liked his conversation better than that of the other young men whose acquaintance she had made. He had a history, people said, and he was poor, in spite of his old name and his title. Now and again he alluded vaguely to some trouble which he had suffered; and Gwendolyn sympathized not knowing with what.

Sir Kenrick sat by her during that and several succeeding dances.

"Do you not wish to dance?" she asked him once.

"Thank you, no. I much prefer my present occupation. I am perhaps selfish, though, in engrossing so much of your time."

"My time is at my own disposal," answered Gwendolyn smiling; "and I do not seem in great demand. I like sitting here and watching the dancing."

"And talking to me?" he asked gravely.

"Certainly," answered Gwendolyn, with a peculiar arch seriousness, not her least charm. "That is understood—and talking to you."

He looked into her fair face and smiled.

"I think sometimes you ought to be painted as Undine, Miss Maltby," he said. "There is something about you which makes one think of moonlight and water and the mystic spirit-world. I should like Frank Dicksee to have the painting of you as Undine."

"With or without a soul?" asked Gwendolyn.

He looked at her again steadily and searchingly.

"With the soul just dawning in her eyes," he answered.

"Was it love that gave the soul?"

"Yes," answered Gwendolyn; "I think so."

And the delicate colour rose softly in her face. She was not versed in the arts of coquetry. She could not play or trifle with anything sacred and beautiful. Her heart beat a little faster than its wont, and she could not meet the earnest glance bent upon her ; but she was not overmuch confused, and she was able to speak quietly and naturally.

"Would you sit for a companion-picture—Sintram?"

He smiled and lifted his eyebrows.

"Am I so dark and so wild as to be a typical Sintram?" he asked.

"I think you would do very well for Sintram after his probation."

"In that case I think the companion-picture should be Verena. Would you sit for that?"

"Verena?"

"Yes ; Sintram's guiding-star."

Before an answer could be framed, Cynthia stood before them.

"They want me to sing in the next room—the musicians are going down to supper. Will you play for me, 'Golden Gwendolyn'?"

"'Golden Gwendolyn'?" repeated Sir Kenrick smiling. "The song, or the accompanist?"

"Both," answered Cynthia. "Come, Gwendolyn, Sir Kenrick will turn over for you."

Cynthia sang well, and the soft harmonies and dreamy cadences floated through the quiet room and hushed the smallest sound. An eager murmur of admiration followed the close of the song.

"Beautiful!" said Sir Kenrick softly. "Who is the composer? Mary Carmichael. It is not like a woman's music. She ought to rise to fame. 'Twixt the sunlight and the shade'—pretty words." And turning to the last verse, he hummed the closing lines:—

"Only 'twixt the light and shade,  
Floating memories of my maid,  
Make me pray for Gwendolyn."

"I must get that song," he said. "'Golden Gwendolyn' will haunt my thoughts."

The hours flew by, guests departed one by one, and at last the sound of rolling wheels no longer disturbed the silence of the square.

In the great rooms only the hosts were left, looking half-satisfied, half-wearied, and exchanging remarks as to the result of their efforts.

"It's been a jolly hop!" cried Bernard, coming up from his last duties at the hall door.—"Gwendolyn, you haven't danced once. Do try the floor with me now; you can't think how jolly it is.—Cicely, play us a good Strauss waltz; there's a dear girl."

Cicely obeyed. Gwendolyn's eyes were unusually bright to-night, her feet were light, her spirits were gay. She and Bernard alike seemed unwearied, as they glided rapidly over the smooth floor.

"Dear children!" said Lady Allardice with emotion. "How well matched they are in every way!"

"Good-night, mamma," said Cynthia; "I am tired. I shall go to bed now."

"Do so, dear girl. It has been a brilliant success.

You made quite a *furor*, Cynthia. I never saw you look so well."

"It's a pity to reach one's culminating point too soon," remarked Cynthia coolly.—"Come, Gwendolyn, I am going, and I want you."

Bernard protested; but Gwendolyn caught Cynthia's eye, and came at once.

"Be careful!" was all she said upon the subject, and her cousin understood her well.

Cynthia sat down languidly by her fire.

"Well, I am glad it is over. There is only the wedding now before me. Did you enjoy it, Gwendolyn?"

"Yes, very much. Didn't you?"

"As much as I expected," and Cynthia's lips curled a little. "It all went off as it should, which is the great thing." Then after a pause she added, "And how about Sir Kenrick Dalrymple?"

"What about him?"

"You seem to be getting on."

Gwendolyn's colour rose, but she answered simply and frankly,—

"I think we like each other; but that is all, Cynthia."

"Oh, that is all, is it?" replied Cynthia slowly, and said no more.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CYNTHIA'S WEDDING.

It was the eve of Cynthia's wedding, and she and Gwendolyn, in dressing-gowns and slippers, sat over the fire in the room of the latter.

In Cynthia's room her trunks and portmanteaus stood all ready. Her wedding-dress and veil hung in one wing of the wardrobe; in the other, the stylish tweed travelling suit in which she was to take her departure.

Everything was in order. Everything seemed to speak of coming change and departure, and the two girls sat facing each other silently, as if they knew it, and were sorry.

Gwendolyn's face expressed most sorrow, and her eyes rested from time to time upon Cynthia with a look of mingled love and anxiety, which seemed rather strange in one so young.

Cynthia lay back languidly, her eyes fixed upon the fire, her thoughts evidently far away, her face expressing more weariness than anything else. Presently she roused herself and said,—

“ Ah well, what is the good of thinking of what might

have been ? By this time to-morrow I shall be a countess. Think of that, Gwendolyn !”

“Don’t, Cynthia.”

“Don’t ? Why not ? Don’t you like the idea ? I do. Think what it will be always to have my own way, never to have to be lectured by mamma any more. To-morrow I shall emancipate myself for ever from the maternal yoke.”

Gwendolyn’s face was troubled.

“Cynthia, I wish you would not talk so—the last night in your old home.”

“Old home !” repeated Cynthia with a long-drawn sigh and an increase of weary sadness in her eyes. “Ah yes, I suppose that is its name, but it sounds a sort of mockery to me.”

“Why should it ?”

“An old home should be full of tender memories, should it not ?”

“Why yes, surely.”

“And when one has been put up to auction by one’s mother, and knocked down to the highest bidder, the tenderness of the memories is apt to become a little dimmed.”

Gwendolyn paused with a pained look upon her face, and then said slowly,—

“‘Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee.’”

“If that is all the inducement offered,” returned Cynthia slowly and listlessly, “it can be hardly said to be a powerful one.”

The next moment Gwendolyn was kneeling at Cynthia's feet, gazing into her pale sad face with eyes which spoke eloquently of love and sympathy.

"Cynthia darling, do tell me, why are you so miserable?"

"I do not think I am miserable. I am only tired and overdone."

"But you are not happy."

Cynthia almost smiled as she shook her head slowly and thoughtfully.

"Is that likely?"

"Cynthia," said Gwendolyn, timidly yet earnestly, "you might be happy if you would."

"You must not puzzle me with riddles to-night, little cousin. I have not brains for them. Have you found out the secret of happiness then, that you can speak so glibly of it?"

"It is not a secret, Cynthia; but I think I have found it out."

"Well?"

"And I think you know it as well as I."

Cynthia made no reply, and no look of interest or of animation dawned upon her face. If she knew whither Gwendolyn's words were tending, she gave her no encouragement, rather the reverse.

But Gwendolyn would not be discouraged. She reached out her hand for the Bible which lay upon the table at the foot of the bed; and she opened it, as she sat upon the ground at Cynthia's feet.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy

laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'

"If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.'

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.'

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Gwendolyn ceased then, looking down at the pages before her, but neither speaking nor raising her eyes to her cousin's face.

There was a long silence. Gwendolyn's heart was full. Could it be that it might be given to her to bring comfort to her cousin's troubled soul?

At last Cynthia spoke.

"What a handsome Bible you have got, Gwendolyn. Who gave it you?"

A thrill of disappointment ran through Gwendolyn; but she answered quietly,—



"Papa did. It was a New-Year's gift; but I did not get it till after his death."

"I thought your father was an atheist."

"No, I am sure he was never that. But he did not talk about religion to any one. I believe, if he had lived, he would have talked to me."

"Much better for you that he did not. I sometimes think atheists must have the best of it. It would be so pleasant not to be troubled by thoughts of a future life or of God's laws."

"O Cynthia, don't."

"If I think so, why shouldn't I say so? I wish I could forget all the religion I was ever taught, and follow the fashionable scepticism of the day. Why can't I disbelieve in God as the rest of the world does? I believe it is all Bertie Heron's fault."

"What?" asked Gwendolyn bewildered.

"Why, that I can't comfortably turn rationalist, like so many others. He just won't let me do that, for he's too clever and logical not to get the best of all arguments; and yet he can't make me feel as he does. Oh dear! I wish I'd never talked to him at all! I believe I should have done with religious doubts and fears by this time but for him."

"Cynthia, you do not mean what you say. You should not say it."

Cynthia sighed.

"Why not? I should be much more comfortable if I could just throw everything overboard, and sail with the stream of fashion."

"Happier without God than with him?"

"I am not with him," answered Cynthia quietly, "and so, I suppose, I am against him. Do you think it is a pleasant thing to feel that God is your enemy?"

Gwendolyn shivered.

"Cynthia, you shall not speak so! God is not your enemy. You could not make him so; I am sure you could not. You may be grieving him and slighting him, but he is loving you."

She would have turned again to the pages of her book for words confirming her own, but Cynthia interposed with an imperative gesture.

"No, Gwendolyn; no more. It only makes the matter worse."

"Cynthia, if you would only listen, if you would only understand, if you would only try."

Cynthia smiled not ungently.

"My little cousin, do you suppose that is all as new to me as it is to you? Do you fancy I have not gone through your stage of happiness and certainty? I knew quite well all you would say beforehand."

"My stage!" echoed Gwendolyn with a sudden sense of chill. "Do you mean that by-and-by I shall change—that I shall forget?"

"I do not know if you will be able to forget—I have not been successful there; but of course you will change. We all have our fits of religious enthusiasm, and they are very pleasant while they last; but they pass away, like all things good and bad, and then we smile at ourselves for our youthful fervour."

Gwendolyn sat silent and dismayed.

Was there some dreadful truth in Cynthia's words? Did not Cynthia generally prove in the right, even in her most dismal theories?

Was it not true that already Gwendolyn had fancied that some of her fervent joy and unclouded happiness had worn off or become overcast? Had she not found that her studies and meditations were hardly so attractive as at first, although of necessity much briefer? Could it be that her state of mind was but a "stage" which would pass away and leave her in much the same condition as of yore? It seemed a dreadful thought to contemplate, and after a few minutes' consideration she seized upon the most consolatory idea which her reflections furnished:—

"But, Cynthia, what of Mr. Carlingford? What of Bertie Heron?"

"Oh, men are different. We are not a bit like them, and never shall be. They 'go the whole hog,' as Bernard says with everything—open infidels, or very religious. Bertie is an oddity, too. He has not his counterpart in the world, I believe; and Mr. Carlingford is a clergyman—it is his business to stick to his creed."

Gwendolyn said nothing. Experience had taught her that she could not argue with Cynthia. An argument generally ended in winning her over to her cousin's way of thinking, and in this particular instance she had no wish to be won over.

Presently Cynthia bent forward and kissed Gwendolyn's brow, smoothing her hair with gentle fingers.

Cynthia's caresses were rare, and were always received with gratitude and responsive love.

"My Golden Gwendolyn, have I been cross and disagreeable to you this last night? I feel as if I had, and it is very bad of me, for you have been my greatest comfort during this trying time. I never thought to have a loving, trusting confidante like you. I never thought to spend the night before my marriage save alone, and you have saved me from the mournful, lonely vigil. Gwendolyn, may I share your bed to-night? Let us banish gloomy thoughts, and build airy palaces of the good things in store for us when I am Lady Tremain and can queen it in a castle. Ah! I believe I shall prove stronger than fate after all!"

"Stronger than fate?"

"Why, yes. Fate has doomed me to sell myself for wealth and station, and of course I ought to pine and languish in my gilded cage; but I feel as if I should do no such thing, but should make myself happy in my own way."

"Yes, I hope you will be happy, *dear Cynthia*," said Gwendolyn earnestly. "I know you will make Lord Tremain a very good wife."

"I shall try," answered Cynthia with sudden earnestness. "I will be a good wife to him, even if I cannot love him. It is the least reparation I can make for the injury I am doing him."

"Injury?"

"I call it an injury to marry a man, feeling as I do towards him. However, as he will not have his eyes opened, he must abide by the consequences."

"I think he need not fear them," said Gwendolyn, with a pride and fondness in her tone which evoked a laughing yet grateful caress from Cynthia.

There was not much sleep for either of the girls that night, but yet they both arose looking brighter and happier than they had done the evening before.

"I am going to look my very best to-day, Gwendolyn," said Cynthia with a smile which was almost bright, "to please Tremain. I must drop the 'Lord' now, I suppose, or he will become restive. I will not be a pale, wan, lifeless bride, of whom the world shall speak compassionately, as of a lamb led to the sacrificial altar, or a girl selling herself to slavery. I will make them think that heart goes with hand, even though it does not."

The house was full of guests, relations of the Allardices, who were all strangers to Gwendolyn, save that she had passed the previous evening in their company.

Lady Allardice was bland and affectionate to all. Cynthia was sweet and gracious, gracefully pensive and engagingly bright. She spent only one brief half-hour at that early, unquiet breakfast, and then retired with Gwendolyn to her own room.

"Shall I help you, my dearest, my best?" asked Lady Allardice sweetly. "Shall your mother help to array you as a bride?"

"No thanks, mamma. You have plenty on your hands. Adèle and Gwendolyn will be all-sufficient."

Certainly Adèle and Gwendolyn proved themselves all-sufficient, if the result was due to their labours.

Cynthia, in her rich, bridal attire, looked exquisitely

beautiful—a consummation less often arrived at than fiction would lead us to believe.

It was easier for Cynthia than for most brides to look her best, for her feelings were not deeply stirred; her soul was not in a tumult of conflicting emotions. Her only regret in leaving home was leaving Gwendolyn; and her cousin, she knew, would be her guest in future days almost as often as she wished.

“I must give you one kiss, my Golden Gwendolyn,” she said, as she stood in her shimmering robes, whilst the admiring Adèle held the filmy veil ready to throw over the graceful head. “I am not going to be sentimental even over you, for sentiment is a mistake in these days, and unbecoming to the wearer of white attire. But you are more to me than the whole company below, and the last kiss I bestow upon any one as Hyacinth Allardice, I bestow upon you. There, my sweet cousin, think kindly of me always; and if I have no tears to commemorate our parting, I have a very great deal of love.”

And then the finishing touches were put, and the bride and bridesmaid descended together.

Lady Allardice sailed up to her daughter in ecstatic delight and pride.

“My sweetest Cynthia! my own child! What a day and an hour this is for a doting mother!”

Cynthia smiled and moved gracefully towards the cluster of eager relatives who were watching her.

“Is it? Well, I hope you will all enjoy the spectacle you have come to see.—No, mamma, I cannot kiss through lace, and I can’t have Adèle’s artistic folds

disarranged.—Cicely, my dear, I never thought to see you a bride-maiden yet, so many times have you despised that honour. Well, the distinguished post seems to suit you. You and Gwendolyn will be my first supporters, I believe. I hope you will not be too deep in metaphysical research to relieve me of my flowers at the right moment.—Gwendolyn, you must be on the watch to supply deficiencies.—Oh, the carriages are come, are they?—Papa, are you quite ready? No; we must wait till the last. We will be in no hurry. The longer a bride keeps every one waiting, the more she is thought of when she does appear.”

Cynthia spoke as she felt, coolly and calmly, and without a trace of nervous agitation. Gwendolyn looked and felt far more excited as she followed Cicely to their carriage, the last but one of the procession.

“O Cicely, I can hardly believe that we are really going to Cynthia’s wedding.”

“Can’t you?”

“It seems so strange just at the last. Cicely, how do you feel?”

“I don’t know.”

“Aren’t you sorry she is going? Shan’t you miss her very much?”

“Hardly so much as you will in many ways. Yet it will be strange at home without her.”

Cicely looked pale, Gwendolyn thought, pale and unusually grave.

“Cicely,” she asked suddenly, “are you very fond of Cynthia?”

"I do not think we have got on very well together, Cynthia and I," answered Cicely quietly. "Yet now I find I am fonder of her than I thought."

Gwendolyn looked up at her and smiled.

"I am glad. I like you, and I like Cynthia very much. Sometimes I think you are much alike in many ways."

"Too much alike to agree?" questioned Cicely. "Ah! here is the church. What a crowd!"

If Lady Allardice had set her heart upon a brilliant and imposing wedding, she certainly realized her ambition. The church was crowded with fashionable people. A bishop and a dean assisted at the ceremony; the attire of bride and bridesmaids defied criticism; and everything went off as smoothly as if the matter had been rehearsed a score of times.

Cynthia's appearance and deportment were perfect. So said united praise. To judge by the beaming face of the bridegroom as he lifted his young wife's veil and kissed her in the sight of them all, he shared emphatically in the general opinion. Perhaps nobody but Gwendolyn observed that in the vestry afterwards the youthful countess kissed only herself and Cicely, and then letting down her veil again smilingly declined the "fashionable bridal embraces" of the multitude.

The breakfast was as successful as the fondest hopes could wish. Lord Tremain was too much the soldier and the general to be ashamed of playing the bridegroom, and his speech was quite the best of the day. There seemed no painful embarrassment over the scene. From the bride's downwards, all faces were smiling and gay.



When Cynthia slipped away at last, only Gwendolyn followed, and then she felt almost unable to speak, as the little French maid unrobed the bride, chattering eagerly in broken English of the ceremony she had been permitted to witness.

"Yes, it was a nice wedding; don't you think so, Gwendolyn? I've been to weddings which were almost as bad as funerals; but to-day I think every one enjoyed it all.—Adèle, you may go now. I will finish alone.—My sweet one, what is the matter?"

Gwendolyn's tears fell fast now.

"I am so sorry you are going, and I do so want you to be happy."

"Good child to have such nice thoughts. Well, you will not miss me long, for we shall soon come back to town. And I do think, dear, that I shall be happy. I am fond of Tremain, and I mean to be very good. If what they all say is true, that ought to make a happy woman of me."

Gwendolyn clung to her still crying, and Cynthia's last act in the old home was to dry the tears, and by caresses and fond words to check the grief of the one being whom she sincerely loved.

It was a comfort to Gwendolyn afterwards that this had been the case, and she was much consoled by the recollection of this last little scene. It helped her to the resolute conclusion, that though Cynthia had made a loveless marriage, and had gone away with dry eyes and smiling lips, she was not yet quite indifferent to her husband, nor quite without regrets for those left behind.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CICELY'S WARNING.

CYNTHIA was gone, and a blank seemed to have fallen upon Gwendolyn.

For a while the pleasure seemed taken out of life, and she went about mechanically, not noticing particularly what happened.

Perhaps this was the reason why she failed to take alarm at Lady Allardice's tactics, or even to be aware how very frequently she and Bernard were thrown together both at home and abroad.

Bernard had never again alluded to the boyish proposal of marriage he had once made to her; and during his absence from home, her own engrossing thoughts, and the preparations for her cousin's wedding, the matter had slipped almost entirely from her mind. Even Cynthia's hints, delivered oracularly from time to time, failed to give her any real uneasiness, and she saw no reason to shrink from the good-natured attentions of her boy cousin; for whatever his mother chose to say, he was still a mere boy, and his manliness was of the physical, not the mental or spiritual, type.

Although Cynthia had gone, and Cicely utterly despised the Row, the morning rides were not abandoned. Every day the horses were led to the door, and certainly five days out of six Bernard was his fair cousin's companion upon her daily ride.

Lady Allardice also looked to her niece to accompany her upon her drives and calls, and even to evening receptions, in place of her eldest daughter. Gwendolyn's mourning was allowed to be no excuse; and she found herself in a short time looked upon quite as a daughter of the house.

At first the experience was a pleasant one. Gwendolyn could not but enjoy the society of people who seemed so much to like and admire her. She was not shy, although she was quiet, and happiness had given an animation and charm to her face which greatly increased its beauty.

Cynthia's maid now devoted all her energies to Gwendolyn, and felt in her artistic soul a deep satisfaction at her own success. Gwendolyn's besetting sin fortunately was not vanity, otherwise her head might have been in danger of being turned by the consciousness of beauty and the admiration it excited.

Cicely did not often accompany her mother into society, neither did Gwendolyn see much more of her after Cynthia's departure than she had done before; but now and again, when a large ball was given, too large or public for Gwendolyn to appear at during this season, then Lady Allardice would demand and obtain the attendance of her second daughter.

On the day following one of these occasions, Cicely made the unwonted proposition that her cousin should ride into the country with her that afternoon.

Gwendolyn assented gladly. Bernard grumbled a little because he had an engagement which would prevent him from making one of the party. Cicely, however, paid little heed to him, and orders were given in accordance with her suggestion.

It was not until they were far away from town, and had enjoyed many a good canter over smooth turf and breezy common, that Gwendolyn became aware that Cicely had an object in this expedition.

"Now, Gwendolyn," she said, reining in her horse, and glancing back at the far-away figure of the groom, who knew how to keep his distance when Cicely was his charge—"now we can have our talk out in peace."

"Talk!" echoed Gwendolyn wonderingly, "what talk?"

"I came out here because I wanted a quiet talk with you. At least I want to ask you a question which may result in a good deal of conversation. Are you going to marry Bernard?"

"No, certainly not! What makes you think of such a thing?"

"Only this, that all the world is beginning to say that you and he are engaged."

"How very ridiculous! He did once think he had a fancy for me; but it has passed long ago."

Cicely's eyebrows went up.

"Did he propose to you?"

"Well, yes, in a sort of a way; but it was all so boyish and absurd, it isn't worth talking of. You mustn't say a word, Cicely. Nobody knows."

"Nobody?"

"Only Aunt Allardice. Bernard told her."

"What did he tell her? Did you refuse him point-blank?"

Gwendolyn began to feel uncomfortable.

"Yes; and then he wanted to know, if I did ever learn to care for him, if—oh, it was all quite silly. I told him I never should; but of course if I did—" and Gwendolyn stopped, laughing at her own incoherence.

Cicely, however, did not laugh.

"Did mamma know there were any 'ifs' in the case?"

"I suppose so. She hoped, I think, that I should change; but I am sure she sees it is no good now. She never says a word, nor Bernard either. Oh, you may be sure they have both forgotten."

"If you don't take care, Gwendolyn," said this Job's comforter concisely, "you'll find that you are engaged to Bernard whether you know it or not."

"Cicely!"

"Every one is talking of it already; and mamma, by significant little smiles and mysterious little shakes and nods, is doing all she can to encourage the delusion."

"But, Cicely, Aunt Allardice knows—"

"My dear Gwendolyn, you will find when you have lived here a little longer (I wonder you have remained in ignorance so long) that mamma never knows anything except what she chooses."

"But, Cicely, I've never done anything—"

"You've not done anything which any cousin might not do, and never a remark be made, if she were poor or plain; but you are an heiress and a person of importance, and you cannot help being talked about."

"Talked about! who talks?"

"Every one. What else have people to do? When any one new comes upon the scene, especially with money and good looks and a good name, there is more talk than ever. Of course mamma knows how you are watched, and that is why you are sent out riding with Bernard every day—why he accompanies you everywhere, meets you at this and that place, and is always constituted your cavalier. I don't suppose he knows anything about it, poor, stupid, honest boy. You may be sure he is not in the plot, or he would revolt or betray; but he is just a puppet, and mamma holds the strings."

"Have I been a puppet too?"

"It looks rather like it. I would have warned you before, but really I only woke up to the meaning of it last night. I wonder Cynthia didn't."

"Cynthia did; but I do not think I quite believed her. Cicely, they could not really pretend I was engaged, and marry me to Bernard against my will."

"No, not exactly; but mamma could make things so uncomfortable for you, could weave such a net round you, that for peace and quietness' sake, and to escape from the odium of being called a jilt and flirt, you would almost be ready to do anything. You are not

strong-minded, Gwendolyn. In some things you are like Cynthia. You know her history."

Gwendolyn sat silent and dismayed, considering the situation in which she was placed, and seeing only too clearly the force of some of Cicely's representations.

Presently she looked up at her cousin and asked simply,—

"What do you advise me to do?"

"I advise you to accept an invitation you will receive to-day or to-morrow to spend a week with Mrs. Carnforth Meynall in her villa on the Thames."

"Mrs. Carnforth Meynall! I hardly know her. Why should she ask me? And how do you know she will?"

"I heard her tell mamma so last night. And mamma was all smiles and sweetness; but I know she will stop your going if she can. Be resolute for once and take your own way. She will not oppose you beyond a certain point; she is too politic. When you have had a week's reflection in new scenes, you can make up your mind to some definite course of action; and when you come back you can inaugurate a new state of things. You will find a break a great help; and you could, if you chose, write to mamma on the subject of the rumour which had reached you, saying that if she did not help you to suppress it, you must find a home elsewhere. That *might* bring her to her senses."

"I shouldn't like to do that—I'm not brave like you—but I should like to get away and be in the country again for a little while. I wonder, though, why Mrs. Carnforth Meynall should invite me."

"She is a sort of a cousin to Sir Kenrick Dalrymple," observed Cicely quietly. "He will most likely be there for the Henley regatta."

Gwendolyn flushed suddenly crimson, and as suddenly grew pale again. She rode on in silence, a new train of thought filling her mind.

There could be no denying that Sir Kenrick Dalrymple occupied a prominent place in her thoughts. She had seen a great deal of him of late, and her interest in him did not diminish. At almost all the places to which she went she met him. He was always ready to claim her attention, to sit beside her, to take her in to supper, to hand her to her carriage. He always seemed on the look-out for her, and whenever Bernard quitted her side, Sir Kenrick was ever ready to take his place.

Gwendolyn was still young and unsophisticated. She did not look at the men who paid her attentions as possible future husbands, nor had the question of ultimate marriage ever seriously entered her head.

Still, now that Cicely had broached the subject, and had pointed out to her the danger which threatened, she could not but give some serious thought to the matter thus brought into notice.

Could she ever consent to marry her cousin Bernard?

Oh no, no! a thousand times no!

Gwendolyn was almost startled at the very emphatic denial her heart gave.

A month or two back she had not felt half so strongly averse to the idea. She did not love Bernard, and could



not seriously contemplate the proposal made her; but it did not rouse in her the sense of determined opposition, almost of disgust, which stirred her to action now.

Why was this change?

Gwendolyn asked herself the question, but after a little self-examination she relinquished the attempt to arrive at a conclusion. The colour had mounted in her cheeks, her eyes had grown bright and shy. She felt that already she had let her thoughts range too fast and too far. It was time to reduce them to order.

Little more was said between the two girls upon their homeward ride. Cicely seldom wasted words. She had felt bound to put Gwendolyn upon her guard ere the danger grew greater; but that mission accomplished, she had no wish to prolong the discussion.

A note was awaiting Gwendolyn upon her return—a note written upon thick creamy paper adorned by a crest in gold.

The girl read it quietly, and then glanced across at her aunt, who seemed to be watching her.

"Mrs. Carnforth Meynall wants me to spend a week with her at Hurlingham. How kind of her to ask me! It would be delightful to see the country again. May I accept, Aunt Allardice?"

"Why, dear child, you surely don't want to run away from us already! I told Mrs. Carnforth Meynall that I feared she would be disappointed. We are deep in engagements, Gwendolyn love, and really I do not know how I could spare my sweet companion."

"I would take Gwendolyn's place for a few days,

mamma," said Cicely; "she looks as if a change of air would do her good."

"I should like to go," said Gwendolyn.

Lady Allardice seemed to ponder a little, and by-and-by she said, in the dubious way which seemed to be almost reluctant,—

"Well, dearest child, nobody is more anxious than I for the furtherance of your enjoyment, but I cannot quite see my way yet. Mrs. Carnforth Meynall keeps a very gay house, and you are still in mourning, and altogether I do not feel as if it would be quite *en règle* to let you go there."

"Well, Aunt Allardice, considering how I have been out in town since Cynthia's wedding, I think it would seem rather odd to decline on these grounds," answered Gwendolyn with unexpected firmness.

"You need not give that reason, dearest; you could say you were too much engaged."

"But I am not too much engaged; and besides, if my mourning is not a sufficient obstacle, and if people know that it is not, why should I not go? Surely it is much less gay to pay a visit to a country house than to go about as I have been doing."

"What you do under my wing, dearest, is one thing," began Lady Allardice sweetly, but some instinct warned her that she had better give way. There was a change in Gwendolyn's attitude towards her which she felt, without being able to define. Could it be that this girl was about to escape from her power, as her daughters had gradually done?

"Still, dear Gwendolyn, as you seem to have set your heart upon it, I will say no more. You shall judge for yourself. Perhaps it was a little bit of selfishness on my part, wanting to keep my sweet young companion with me. Now that I have lost my Cynthia, I cannot help clinging the more to you; but I must not let myself grow selfish." And Lady Allardice smiled sweetly at her niece, which smile Gwendolyn returned, though with a little effort.

"My poor Bernard will be quite disconsolate. We shall have to console each other," observed Lady Allardice, during the course of the day.

Gwendolyn's lip curled involuntarily and her cheek flushed. She did not raise her eyes, or answer; but Cicely said, in her incisive way,—

"So long as Bernard has a horse to ride and a cricket-match to watch, he will not stand in any sore need of consolation."

"You do not understand the dear boy's feelings," said the fond mother with a smile.

"Bernard's feelings are not a matter of very much importance to anybody, even to himself," returned Cicely. "I doubt if they are ever deep enough to merit compassion."

It was with feelings of great relief that Gwendolyn found herself on her way to Hurlingham. During the past three days she had had ample opportunity to verify Cicely's words, and she was quite certain that a net was being woven round her.

That her aunt was the prime mover in the attempt to

bind her to Bernard, there could be no doubt; and yet, try as she would, Gwendolyn could find no opportunity to speak out and declare herself free. Her words were forestalled; no open allusion to any understanding gave her the chance she wanted. It would have been absurd to fly out against statements which had never been made; and yet implied hints, which Lady Allardice could always explain away with a plausible smile, were harder to bear than open accusations could have been.

But for the present all that was over. She was free now from all such annoyances—free for a whole week, for a fortnight perhaps, if the invitation should be extended, as Cicely thought it might be. Adèle, her maid, was her only companion upon her visit. For a while, at least, she would be her own mistress, and could make her own plans as to how it would be advisable to act in the future.

When the train drew up, it was Sir Kenrick Dalrymple who was on the platform to hand her from the carriage; and it was he who drove her to the quaint old river-side house, with many apologies for the absence of the hostess, his cousin, who had been unavoidably detained at home.

Mrs. Carnforth Meynall's warm reception made ample amends for the omission which had not been one whit resented. Gwendolyn felt that she was received as a distinguished guest, and made much of amongst these strange people, and the sensation was a pleasant one.

Sir Kenrick Dalrymple was not a stranger, however, and it seemed natural enough that he should pay special

attention to the fair young guest. It was he who took her a short row upon the shining river as the sun set in a blaze of glory; he who took her in to dinner, and afterwards persuaded her to sing to his accompaniment the song "Golden Gwendolyn" which had so taken his fancy.

And when the evening was far advanced, he said, "You must come outside and hear our nightingales, Miss Maltby. We are very proud of them. The moonlight on the water is perfection to-night."

So Gwendolyn, nothing loath, wandered out with him into the still, sweet night; and it required but little persuasion to induce her to enter a boat and be sculled by him four or five hundred yards up stream, to where a little wood descended to the banks of the river, in which the nightingales were holding high musical festival.

"Isn't it sweet?" said Gwendolyn, after they had listened awhile in silence, whilst the boat drifted slowly down the silver river.

"Perfect!" he answered, his eyes upon her face.

"How different from London!"

She sighed a sigh of restful satisfaction; and he asked,—

"You were not sorry then to come to us?"

"Oh no, I was pleased," she answered simply, not heeding the significance of his words.

"I had feared the attractions of town would prove the stronger," he said.

"Oh no!"

"I am glad; but it was almost more than I had dared to hope."

Gwendolyn smiled naturally and sweetly.

"Was it you who asked me then?"

"My cousin, at my request."

"It was very kind of you both. I did so want a breath of purer air. What made you think of it?"

The question was innocently put, but the answer made Gwendolyn's cheek flame and her heart beat fast with mingled pleasure and pain:—

"Because I felt that my life here would be a blank without you. I could not have left town if you had still been there."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### LOVE'S DREAM.

FOUR days had passed—four golden days of sunshine and happiness.

Gwendolyn, living for the first time during her life in love's young dream of happiness and hope, was hardly conscious of the flight of time.

All she seemed to see was one face that hardly left her during the long hours of the cloudless days; all she seemed to hear was one deep, low-toned voice, whose accents were like music to her ears.

Certainly no two lovers ever had a more propitious time in which to exchange their vows.

Mrs. Carnforth Meynall was determined to give her handsome young cousin, the head of the family, the chance he so coveted of wooing the beautiful girl whom he loved; and she was glad indeed that his choice had fallen upon one whose ample means would go far towards restoring the impoverished fortunes of the family, and do much in the important task of winning back to wealth and order the long-neglected home and property of the Dalrymples.

"Poor Kenrick is so romantic and so unworldly that he would marry a beggar-maid if he happened to love her," said she to one of the friends staying in the house. "I cannot feel thankful enough for the choice he has made. Miss Maltby is particularly sweet and charming, and quite an heiress. She has a large fortune and a fine property, which, when sold, would realize enough to do great things at Dalrymple. Oh yes, things could not have framed better; and after the way the poor boy has been served, I am most thankful."

"Is it a settled thing then?" asked the other lady with interest.

"Well, not quite, I believe. I do not think the magic words have yet been spoken, but there is no doubt now as to the result. Ah, see! there they go up the river together. I have no doubt we shall soon have some news to hear."

Gwendolyn was steering the skiff, and Sir Kenrick was sculling quietly and resolutely up the stream.

The evening light fell softly upon them. He in his white flannels, with his bronzed face and dark, earnest eyes, looked peculiarly attractive that day; the tender resolution of his face giving it an added charm.

Gwendolyn was unusually grave and pensive, but the sweetness and beauty of her face were in no way marred by the expression which it wore.

It was rather a silent row, the splash of the sculls and the ripple of the water against the boat being the only sounds to break the stillness, save the rustle of the summer leaves and the whispering of the breeze.



Some silence is certainly golden.

There was a favourite spot of theirs about a mile up the stream—a quiet, shady back-water, where the trees overhung the stream, and where the rushes and water-lilies grew in profusion.

Thither they found their way this still June evening; and to one of the overhanging branches Sir Kenrick moored the skiff, whilst he and his companion landed, and wandered slowly together in the still, green woods.

Need we tell what passed between them? Are not such scenes best left to the imagination? Pen and paper can only give such a poor and colourless representation of that magic union of heart with heart, can only paint so feebly the picture which is so radiant and so fair to those who look upon it together—the picture of their future, lifelong happiness.

Gwendolyn seemed to wake from a dream of unutterable bliss to find Sir Kenrick's arms about her; his lips pressed to her brow. His voice was in her ears:—

“My love, my love! are you happy?”

“Happy!” she repeated, passing her hand across her brow. “Oh, I did not know what happiness was like before.”

“My darling! my own!”

Gwendolyn was bewildered by her happiness. She could not understand it. In her somewhat monotonous life she had experienced no such intense, passionate joy. Where did it come from, such joy and such love? But why trouble herself with questions? He loved her—was not that enough?

Gwendolyn's nature was honest to its heart's core.

Where she loved, she loved without reserve; where she trusted, she trusted utterly; and now that the supreme moment of her life had come, she gave herself away without one doubt or one fear.

How could she doubt, how could she fear, with those two dark, tender eyes looking into hers, all filled with love and devotion?

An hour had passed before they sought their boat again. It might have been a week, a month, a year, for the marvellous change it had made in two lives. Love certainly has an independent calendar of its own by which to chronicle the flight of time.

"My Gwendolyn, can this be true?" Sir Kenrick said, as they floated down the stream together.

Her answer was a smile, but it said enough.

"And you, who know so little of me—can you trust yourself to me?"

"Yes."

"Can you give yourself to me without one fear?"

"Yes."

"You are very brave, my Gwendolyn, to know so little and to dare so much."

Gwendolyn's dark eyes met his in one look of loving fearlessness.

"I do not know so little. I know you. Is not that enough?"

"It shall be the work of my life to justify your trust," he answered earnestly. "Gwendolyn, shall we fight that crusade of yours together—some day?"

She smiled, well pleased that he had not forgotten

their first interview, to which she had not alluded during their later acquaintance.

"I should like to think that we should not be living just for pleasure and ourselves," she answered with a serious earnestness which sat well upon her.

"We will not," he answered. "We will do what you will. I will do your bidding. You shall be my guardian angel, my guiding star—my wife."

"No," she answered gently, "not that. Let me be your wife and helpmeet."

"You shall be what you will, my sweet love, my Gwendolyn, and I will be what you will. Henceforward I will live only for you."

"And for God," she added reverently.

She did not notice that this addition passed without assent.

She had told him, in her simple, girlish fashion, the history of her life, quiet and uneventful enough, until the father's death changed the course of its smooth existence. There was no confession to be made of a former love, a first love—a broken vow, or a broken heart. The love which Gwendolyn offered was the first which had ever been hers to give.

"It seems more than I deserve," said he, as he listened and looked.

"More! O Kenrick, how could I give you less?"

He stooped and kissed her.

"My love, I want no less. I am grasping. I want all that I can get; but not the less do I feel my own unworthiness."

"I will not have you say so."

"I do but say the truth."

"You unworthy!" and Gwendolyn laughed a laugh of pure happiness and defiance.

"Yes, Gwendolyn, I mean what I say, though I love you the more for your unbelief. My history is not a simple one like yours. Its page is stained with sorrow, which your love will wash white."

"Sorrow!" she said, and looked up at him with quick sympathy; "you have known sorrow?"

"Yes, Gwendolyn, much sorrow. I have not had a happy life so far. But now it seems to me that all my troubles are over."

"Tell them to me," she said earnestly. "Let me share them, even if they are over."

"Briefly then—I must be brief. Time seems too precious to spend talking of myself. Will you have the tale now? We can listen to the voices of the river and the nightingales whilst I tell my story."

She fixed her eyes upon him and waited.

"Sorrow and poverty are my earliest recollections. We are a fallen, decaying family, Gwendolyn, and troubles came thickly upon us during my boyhood. Times were bad, money was scarce, land had depreciated, and everything seemed to go against us. A landed proprietor with an old name, a title, and no money, is one of the most unfortunate objects of humanity; and such a man was my father. He sank under the accumulation of anxieties; and matters went no better, save that I was a minor, and therefore could not draw such miserable

revenue as was left us. My mother did not long survive my father; but she worked powerfully upon my feelings whilst she lived, and on her death-bed made me swear a solemn vow to retrieve the fallen fortunes of my house before I died, and never to rest satisfied until I had done so."

"And you did so?"

"I did. I could not well refuse. To me it seemed the one thing left for me to do. I was young then, and did not know the almost insurmountable difficulties in my path."

"You have not done it yet?"

"No."

Gwendolyn's face beamed, and she held out her hand and clasped his.

"Then we shall be able to work for it together."

She did not know that she held in her possession already means to accomplish his object. In such matters she was still a child; but she did think it would be a noble thing to help him in his quest.

He pressed her hand closely as she spoke, and kissed her as he said,—

"My own generous love! I feel ashamed to go on with my story."

"But I want to hear it all. You must go on."

"I grew to manhood without attaining my ambition. At Oxford I did well, but there, as here, competition is severe, and I never could obtain the prizes for which I struggled. I grew hopeless and dispirited. I was a disappointed man, until one day I thought I saw happi-

ness before me: I thought I had won the love of a good woman."

Gwendolyn looked earnestly at him.

"Yes, my darling, I must be truthful; I did once love before, and love truly, though (heaven be my witness!) not as I love you. She was fair, she was sweet, she seemed to love me, and I trusted her. How she repaid my trust you shall hear.

"She was never tired of telling me her love or of hearing my story. She was enthusiastic in her wish to help me. Later on I found that she had prospects of considerable wealth. To make my old home a palace, and the name of Dalrymple great and honoured, seemed the summit of her ambition. One day when I saw her she was full of it. Four days later I saw in the papers that she had made a runaway marriage with a young marquis, one of the fastest men about town."

"Ah!" cried Gwendolyn, and said no more.

"I had been most shamelessly deceived all along. The girl was merely a pretty adventuress, with money but no family, anxious only to make a big match and raise herself. At first a baronet seemed high game for her; and I, an inexperienced youth, fell into her hands, and she made a fool of me. She looked twenty-two, and said she was so; really she was thirty, and a thorough woman of the world. When she found she could soar higher she did so, and just jilted me without one word. So now you know the history of my first romance."

"How dreadful!" said Gwendolyn.

"Yes, it was so to me, for I really had believed in her;

and it shook all my confidence in the whole world. Of course I knew I had had a wonderful escape—that she would have made my life miserable, that she was not worth one regret; but yet I had been fond of her, and it seemed a shocking thing to be treated so. It made me very unhappy.”

“I can understand that.”

“I believe you can; and I tell you the whole truth, feeling convinced you can pity even a foolish and groundless suffering. It is dreadful to have one's confidence shaken as I had mine—to have one's faith in human nature, in womanly love, roughly uprooted as mine was. For years I avoided the society of women. I determined never to trust and never to love again; but I saw you, and you see what you have made of my resolutions.”

And after the stories were told the minutes flew by unheeded, and each minute seemed to bind more closely together the two hearts whose vows of fidelity had been that day exchanged.

When Gwendolyn reached her room that night she felt altogether too happy and too much moved to be able to sleep. She thought she would take the opportunity and write two necessary letters.

The first ran thus:—

“MY DEAR AUNT ALLARDICE,—Mrs. Carnforth Meynall has asked me to stay here another week, and I have said I will. I am writing to tell you that I am engaged to Sir Kenrick Dalrymple, and I hope you and uncle will

approve. It only happened to-day ; and I am very happy. I hope you will be pleased too. Kenrick will call upon uncle in a day or two when he is in town.—  
Your affectionate niece,

“ GWENDOLYN MALTBY.”

The second letter was somewhat longer :—

“ MY DARLING CYNTHIA,—I am so happy I must write and tell you. I am engaged to be married. Can you guess to whom ? I think you can—to Sir Kenrick Dalrymple. I believe I've cared for him a good while, but I did not understand what it meant till a day or two ago ; and to-day it was all settled.

“ O my poor darling, when I think of you and Reginald Kennedy, I feel how selfish I am to write all this to you ; but there is nobody else I can talk to, and I do want some one who understands. I think you are happy yourself, even if it is not all it might have been ; and I know you will be glad to know how happy I am. O Cynthia, I am quite sure that no other happiness is like it ; I never knew that it could be like this. I hope it isn't wrong ; but I can't think of anything or anybody but Kenrick, and other things seem just as if they were nothing. I do mean to be good, and not forget what I have learned ; but I can't understand how loving God comes first, when this sort of love is given us. I know you will know what I mean, and not think me wicked, for you have felt the same, I know. You are the only person I can write to, and I feel as if I wanted to tell



somebody, because I don't think it can be wrong, and I am so very, very happy.

"YOUR OWN GWENDOLYN."

Answers to these two letters came in due course. The interval between their despatch and the receipt of the replies seemed to be spent by Gwendolyn in a happy dream, and no cloud arose upon the horizon of the golden future. Not even Lady Allardice's characteristic reply could mar the sweetness of a first love's joy:—

"MY DEAR GWENDOLYN,—Your letter certainly astonished me not a little.

"When a girl is half engaged already to one man (at least has permitted a probationary engagement to be made, pending a final decision), it is a very strange and unconventional way of procedure to engage herself definitely to some one else, without releasing herself first from the former bond. No doubt your inexperience has misled you, and undue pressure been laid upon you in other quarters. When young girls will leave their natural protectors and advisers for comparative strangers, and those the interested parties, of course they will fall into error and danger.

"As to poor Bernard, he must bear the loss as best he can. I cannot but think you have been led to act rashly and hardly towards him, and I hope you may not have reason to repent it when too late.

"For your choice, I cannot say I like or approve it. Sir Kenrick Dalrymple is, I fear, little better than a

fortune-hunter, though a man of good family; and if you wished to marry rank and title, you had better have looked higher. As to that, Bernard will be a baronet in due course, and a far richer one than Sir Kenrick.

"Still, my dear, you are your own mistress, and we have no power to control your choice, even if it does not quite meet our wishes. I did hope to have you for a daughter, but of course such wishes cannot always be realized.

"One thing I do ask of you—be in no haste. Take time to consider carefully the step you propose taking, and do not be led away by mere girlish romance and sentiment, which will soon pass. Take a sensible, practical view of the question, and see if the future looks as attractive a few weeks hence as it does now. If on consideration you feel, as we do, that you might do much better for yourself than this, I will make your way plain to escape from the trap into which youthful inexperience has led you to fall.—Your affectionate aunt,  
E. M. ALLARDICE."

It was not a pleasant letter, yet Gwendolyn laid it down with a smile, and with the exclamation,—

"Poor Aunt Allardice!"

Cynthia's letter was far more comprehending, though briefer:—

"DEAREST CHILD,—My best wishes for your happiness, and I trust life will always look to you *couleur de rose*. My young dream came to so untimely a con-

clusion that I can hardly say how long the state of ecstatic bliss remains. May it be long in your case! I don't know much of Sir Kenrick, but have no doubt he is all you represent. I am longing to see you, but see no chance yet, as affairs at Tremain require our presence. No; don't be afraid of happiness. You will have none too much as life goes on, if your experiences are like mine. Make much of it whilst it is yours. I am tranquil and content now; but my dream is over, my romance played out. Enjoy yours so long as you can. May it be longer lived than mine! Some, I believe, last a lifetime. What can that feel like?

"CYNTHIA."

"Mine will last a lifetime," said Gwendolyn, with a fond, triumphant smile, as she folded up the letter.

When Cicely wrote her brief congratulation, she asked in her straightforward fashion,—

"Is Sir Kenrick a good man? What is his religion? Has he one?"

Gwendolyn smiled as she read this letter, and yet the words haunted her.

As the days flew by, she opened her heart to him more and more, and his indulgent smiles and caresses almost satisfied her that he was at one with her—almost, but not quite.

One day she asked him plainly,—

"Kenrick, what do you believe?"

"I believe in you," was the answer.

"No, but I mean in religion, dear?"

"You are my religion."

Gwendolyn smiled tenderly, yet shook her head.

"That will not do. Love to me must not stand first. God must be first, Kenrick."

He held her closely in his arms.

"God gave you to me, and he gave us our love. If it is a God-sent gift, why should we fear it? I accept it as such, and bless him for it, and for you. When we are man and wife you will learn to know, for I will teach you, what we mean by the religion of love."

And Gwendolyn's face relaxed. She did not understand him, though she thought she did; and she was content.

When she went back to town and saw Cicely, she told her with a radiant face,—

"He is very good!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A SUDDEN STORM.

A MONTH had passed away since Gwendolyn's return to town, and the hurry and rush of the season began to wane, and one and another spoke of leaving town, and some had already flown.

Gwendolyn began to long eagerly for rural sights and sounds; and as Sir Kenrick was invited to spend a few weeks at Condoever Castle, she felt more than ever wishful for the family migration.

Gwendolyn's happiness was still undimmed. No shadow had fallen upon the bright stream of her life, hardly a ripple had disturbed its shining surface.

Just now and again, whilst she and her affianced husband talked together, a barely-formed doubt, a tiny perplexity would arise from some word dropped by him, and she would ask herself with something of wonderment and dismay,—

“Can he be selfish? Can he be indifferent? Can he be self-seeking?”

But the next moment all doubt would be merged in self-reproach that she *could* harbour such a thought

against so noble and loving a soul, and she would make up by an increase of devotion for the injustice of an unspoken thought.

But these halcyon days were not to last, and the storm was already hovering over her which was soon to make shipwreck of her happiness.

Had she been less engrossed by her own dreams and joys, she might already have seen, by the anxious looks of her uncle and aunt, that all was not well. She might have guessed that it was not for nothing that the family lawyer and her father's solicitor from Wylmington spent hours closeted with Sir Frederic in his library, and that their faces always looked more grave and impenetrable after each interview.

No; Gwendolyn heeded nothing of all this. Her love and her lover absorbed all her thoughts; and it was only when his manner became grave, preoccupied, and absent, that she began to wonder if anything could be wrong.

"Kenrick!" she exclaimed anxiously, "you have been anxious of late. Tell me, what is the matter? Let me share it whatever it is. Are you in any trouble—in any difficulty? Please tell me."

His face was grave and troubled.

"I am afraid we shall both suffer, Gwendolyn. Have they not told you?"

"No; I know nothing. But, Kenrick, troubles we can share cannot hurt us much."

He caressed her, but did not look at her or smile.

"You talk like a child, Gwendolyn; but then you do not know."

"Tell me," she said, beginning to tremble. "It is not—O Kenrick, it is not anything that can part us?"

He laughed in rather a forced, uneasy way.

"Part us! Nonsense, child; what put that into your head? Are you tired of me already, that you talk so glibly of parting?"

She clung to him passionately, weeping silently. What made him speak so? What had changed him? Could it be her fancy, or was some trouble looming before her in the future?

"Don't cry, Gwendolyn; don't be a child. We must make the best of a bad job. I daresay things will come out rather better in the end. Lawyers always do croak. We must see how we stand by-and-by."

Gwendolyn checked her tears by a strong effort, but her voice sounded tremulous and piteous.

"But I don't understand, Kenrick. Please tell me what has happened."

But Sir Kenrick rose, and kissed her more carelessly (or so she fancied) than he had ever done before.

"Your uncle or aunt will explain—it is their place, not mine; we will talk matters over later, when you do know all. Good-bye; keep up a brave heart. I daresay it will be better than it seems."

"I would so much rather you told me," began Gwendolyn wistfully; but he was gone, and she was left alone with her doubts and fears.

"I believe aunt and uncle are together in the study," said the girl to herself, with the calmness of extreme dismay; "I will go and ask them what all this can mean."

Gwendolyn was right, and her entrance was hailed with something of relief.

"My dear," began her uncle kindly, "I suppose you are aware that something important and untoward has occurred during the past week."

"Kenrick has just told me so. I want you to explain."

And Gwendolyn sat down and looked at her uncle with an expectant air of resolution.

"Yes, my dear, I must do that now that I have really made out the state of affairs. They are bad enough, I fear. Your father was a large shareholder in the —— Bank, and the bulk of his fortune was placed there. That bank has just suspended payment; indeed it is regularly smashed up. Your liabilities as a leading shareholder are very great. In point of fact, my poor girl, your whole fortune, with the exception of some four thousand pounds, will be swept away in this unlucky failure."

Gwendolyn took the news bravely. She had learned of late something of the value of money, but still she bore the shock of this news with a fortitude which had less in it of ignorance than her relatives imagined. After a moment or two of silence she asked,—

"And Wylmington?"

"Wylmington is yours still, and there lies the best part of the whole business. That must be sold as soon as possible, and should fetch some five-and-twenty or thirty thousand pounds. With that fortune you will still be something of an heiress, my dear. So, much as we



deplore this sad failure, you will be well dowered still, and Sir Kenrick ought not to—”

Sir Frederic did not seem exactly to know how to finish his sentence, and Gwendolyn was too much absorbed by her own thoughts to observe his floundering or his awkward hesitation.

As the outcome of her thoughts, she said quietly, but very resolutely,—

“I shall not sell Wylmington.”

“Not sell Wylmington!” echoed Sir Frederic blankly. “How then will you live?”

“I have four thousand pounds,” began Gwendolyn; but her aunt was speaking, and she turned to listen.

“You will have no choice in the matter, dear child; it must be done.”

“Must!”

“Yes, you have no means whatever of keeping it up.”

But Gwendolyn answered quickly,—

“It can keep itself up; the rents of the farms shall go towards that.”

“It is time you ceased to be a child, dear Gwendolyn,” said Lady Allardice, with a touch of severity. “You cannot live upon the interest of four thousand pounds, even if that amount should be saved from the wreck. You have no choice in the matter. You must sell your property.”

Still Gwendolyn did not yield.

“I will let it, if I must, but I will not sell it. I am quite determined.”

Her aunt and uncle looked at her in a sort of despair.

"You must be mad!" exclaimed Lady Allardice impatiently. "What can be your motive for wishing to retain such a dismal old place?"

"I love it!" cried Gwendolyn, clasping her hands together—"I love it, and papa loved it. I will never sell it away to strangers. I would rather go there and live on two hundred a year—"

"Really, Gwendolyn, this is not a matter to be treated in such a spirit of levity. Live at Wylmington on two hundred a year! What next?" and Lady Allardice fanned herself with the rapidity of irritation.

Gwendolyn was conscious that she had made a blunder, and said more gently,—

"No, perhaps I could not do that. But I will still not consent to sell the place. I will let it, and the rental will bring me in quite as much as I need."

"I wonder what Sir Kenrick will say to such a decision," sneered Lady Allardice.

"Yes; we will leave her to settle the matter with Dalrymple," said Sir Frederic, catching at the idea.—  
"He will soon bring you to a different frame of mind."

Something in the tone adopted by her relatives stung Gwendolyn to the quick.

"Kenrick will understand," she said proudly. "He will see as I do. He is noble and disinterested, and he loves me too well to hurt me. Leave us together, and we will soon settle our affairs. Kenrick will understand."

"Yes, he will indeed ; and as he is a man of the world, he will tell you the same as we do. Life is not all sentiment and love-making, Gwendolyn, as you will soon find out for yourself. Take my advice, and do not try his patience too far. If you do, you may do much harm. Quarrels are more easily made than mended."

But Gwendolyn could stand no more. Quarrel!—she and Kenrick quarrel! and over a question of money! Did her aunt think to dictate to her how to act towards her lover? Did she think herself capable of understanding his feelings? Amid all her trouble and bewilderment of mind the girl smiled proudly to herself. As if Kenrick would not understand! As if money would make any difference to him! It was too wicked and unjust a thought to be harboured for a moment—just such a thought as Lady Allardice's worldly mind would evolve. Oh, it was too dreadful! Oh, if Kenrick would only come, and show them all how noble and disinterested he was!

His changed manner that morning was all forgotten. Of course he was anxious and troubled for her sake. Men always do grow absent and preoccupied when bad news is impending. He had even been too tender over her to tell her that bad news himself. But he would come again, now that she knew it, to show her how little he cared about such a loss so long as she herself was his. Oh yes, he would come again soon, and share her sorrow and her joy; and nothing could seem very hard to bear, so long as love was left to them.

She would not even trouble to think or to plan until he was with her to help her.

He did come that day. She heard his step upon the stair, and she rose with a beating heart to throw her arms about his neck and be comforted by his loving caresses and manly words of tender faithfulness.

The door opened and Dalrymple entered, but Gwendolyn did not run to him with that impulse of the previous moment.

His face wore an impatient frown, and instead of the words of loving greeting which she had heard in anticipation a hundred times already, he asked sharply, and in a tone she had never heard before,—

“What is this I hear of you, Gwendolyn? Is it a joke, or a misplaced piece of childish folly?”

Gwendolyn’s heart seemed suddenly to stand still. She sat down as she said quietly,—

“What do you mean, Kenrick?”

“Why, what about that absurd reluctance of yours to sell Wylmington? Don’t you see that you have no choice? It must be done!”

“Why?”

“Why?” He pulled at his moustache in visible irritation. “Why, how do you suppose we are to live?”

“We shall be poor, I know,” Gwendolyn answered steadily. “But between us we shall have enough to live upon. We shall not mind poverty if we share it together, shall we, Kenrick?”

He pushed back his chair with so hasty a movement that it fell over backwards. After two or three turns

up and down the room, he came back and stood looking down at her.

"Now, look here, Gwendolyn," he said, not ungently, "there's a time for love-making and pretty speeches and vows; and quite right too, for they're pleasant things enough in their way, as we know. But life isn't altogether made up of soft speeches and sentiment, and we can't always live in the state commonly called 'Fool's Paradise.' We've had a very good time of it, you and I; but really we must rouse ourselves now that the time of awakening has come."

"The time of awakening has come," repeated Gwendolyn mechanically.

"It has indeed. Matters have assumed a very serious aspect. Of course, I do not blame you. It is your misfortune, not your fault, that things have turned out thus; but still it entirely changes the look of our future, and it is, of course, very hard upon me."

"Hard upon you?"

"Yes, to be sure; you must be able to see that for yourself. Really, Gwendolyn, you must pull yourself together and take a practical view of the case. I fell in love with you, as you know, and when I knew you to be wealthy I was glad; for my ambition, as you know, is yet unfulfilled, and your sympathies were all enlisted on my behalf. Now that your fortune is gone, my hopes have of course received a blow; but my love has not changed, and I see a way by which we may still be happy together, and work out our life's object in unison."

He sat down and took her hand in his. Her eyes turned hungrily and wistfully towards him. He did not return the gaze, but pressed her hand, and went on talking.

"You see, dearest, we must look at things all round. I am a poor man with landed property; you are a poor woman with landed property. We could not possibly burden ourselves with two estates and no funds to keep them up. There is no way but this: Wylmington must be sold, and with the money, partly invested, and partly spent in the restoration and enrichment of Dalrymple, we shall do very well, although we shall not be able to embark on all the undertakings we have planned. I am sure you must see the force of this."

Gwendolyn's face expressed comprehension, but not submission. There was a thread of strong determination in her composition; the faithfulness of her own love was quick to detect the least taint of insincerity in his. Should she put his love to the proof? Should she test the strength of his devotion? Would the golden link that bound them together snap under the strain? She trembled and sickened at the thought, but the womanliness of her nature came to her aid. If his love could change or falter before so slight a test, was it worth the having?

"I do not see why my ancestral home should be sold," she answered steadily. "I promised my father I never would part with it. It has been for hundreds of years in our family. No; I cannot sell it."

"But really, Gwendolyn, there is no other way."

"I promised—"

"Pooh! that is nothing. Circumstances alter cases. A promise like that is not worth a moment's thought. Your father would be the first to say so."

"I will let it," said Gwendolyn; "that and the farms will bring in a few hundreds. We shall not be so very poor after all, Kenrick."

Her voice shook,—it was all she could do to command herself; but he was not heeding her.

"A few hundreds a year! What good will that do?" he questioned scornfully. "Why, Dalrymple wants a few thousands spending upon it before we could go there at all. It is all falling to pieces."

"But Wylmington is not falling to pieces," said Gwendolyn eagerly. "Wylmington is a beautiful old house, and in perfect repair; and all the estate is in good condition. Papa saw that everything that needed doing was done. It stands well, and is healthy, and so beautifully situated all among wood and water. O Kenrick, why shouldn't we keep Wylmington and live there, and sell Dalrymple, which is in such a bad state?"

"Sell Dalrymple!" he echoed, looking blankly at her. "Why, you must be mad."

"Why? It is in such a much worse condition than Wylmington, I should have thought it would have been a good thing to get rid of it. Is it entailed?"

"Entailed? No; but the Dalrymples have lived there for generations and generations. You're not such a Goth as to expect me to sell my ancestral home away to strangers?"

"You expect me to sell mine," answered Gwendolyn quietly. "The Maltbys have lived at Wylmington for generations and generations."

"My dear Gwendolyn, you must see the difference—a baronet, and the direct line; the Maltbys must die out at your marriage. And then you forget,—there is the vow I made my mother."

"Why is the vow you made to your mother to be so much more important than my promise to my father?" asked Gwendolyn in the same quiet way.

Sir Kenrick started up in excessive irritation, and spoke with a sharpness and candour unusual with him.

"Really, Gwendolyn, your folly and childishness pass all bounds. Your head seems quite turned by this misfortune. I will leave you time to come to your senses; for if I stay longer now, I may be tempted to speak in a way you would hardly care to hear. You must please to remember that, as my promised wife, you are bound to think of me and of my interests. I hope this hint will be sufficient, and that I shall find you in a better frame of mind to-morrow. Do not try my patience too far, or you may have cause to repent your obstinacy."

And Sir Kenrick Dalrymple flung himself from the room in a rage.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE LOVE OF THE WORLD.

A VERY dark time followed for Gwendolyn—a time of dreary doubt that verged upon despair.

She had made an idol of the man she loved—had endowed him with every virtue, every noble attribute her soul could conceive; and she had worshipped with a glad heart the work of her own hands. She had thought she had found one noble soul, one human being without a stain, without one sordid thought for self; and she had raised him upon a pedestal and enshrined his image in the innermost recesses of her heart.

And now?

Now her idol was tottering to its fall; not even her love and devotion could hold it steady in its place. Already the bitter sense of desolation and disappointment entailed by such a fall was overshadowing her, and turning the noonday of her happiness into the blackness of night.

There seemed no light anywhere in these first terrible hours of awakening; all hope, all comfort, all was gone from her. She found, as most of us find at least once

in our lives, that she had taken the dross of the world for the gold of heaven, and had forgotten God in her love for man.

It was a bitter, bitter awakening. And she had to face it *alone*—alone and in desolation of soul; for she had thrust aside, in the unconscious carelessness of happiness, the only thing that would have brought her peace and consolation. She had unknowingly adopted the creed of the world—had made love her religion, its object the man she loved. She was reaping the harvest of her own sowing. It was now dark, and Jesus was not come.

Again and again, in her misery and pain, she almost resolved to yield the point which seemed as if it must rob her of her love.

If she yielded all that Kenrick wished, he would accord to her the old love that was so sweet, which had made life one long dream of joy to her. The promise she had made to her father of her own accord—not exacted by any words of his—did not really lie very heavily upon her. She knew that changed circumstances entail further changes, and that her father would be the first to bid her act so as best to insure her own happiness.

But would her own happiness be insured by such a step? Would the love she might thus win back ever be to her what the first love had been? Could she ever trust its strength and sincerity again, after it had been thus rudely shaken? Was a love that could be bought and sold like that, worth the having at any price?

Gwendolyn's heart answered that question in an emphatic negative; and although the battle had to be fought out again and again, her womanly instincts always triumphed in the end.

So when the next day came she was able to meet Sir Kenrick with a calm, resolute composure of manner, and a face that, although pale and wan, expressed determination and fearlessness.

Sir Kenrick had rather repented his ill-temper of the previous day as impolitic and damaging to his cause. He was sufficiently in love with his beautiful Gwendolyn to have no desire to see her slip away from his grasp. If not an heiress, she was still wealthy, or would be when her property was sold; and her beauty and gentleness and intense devotion to himself had greatly endeared her to him.

Of all things, Sir Kenrick Dalrymple loved admiration and the sense of power.

So he greeted Gwendolyn with more tenderness than on the previous occasion; and if she was less responsive than usual, he did not trouble his head about that—he was confident in his power over her.

He sat down beside her, and would have taken her hand; but she drew herself a little away, and waited quietly for him to speak.

"Well, dearest Gwendolyn, I have been reproaching myself during all my waking hours for my momentary irritation of yesterday. I daresay you have been doing the same for your childish, unpractical words which provoked it. To-day we shall understand each other better."

"Perhaps," said Gwendolyn. "I am not sure. I think I understood all too well yesterday."

He laughed uneasily.

"You speak in riddles, fair sphinx. Tell me more plainly what you would say."

"I would say this:—My decision about Wylmington remains unchanged. I would rather remain a poor woman than sell it. If you do not care to marry me as a poor woman, I will not marry you as a rich one, even were it possible."

"Gwendolyn!"

He was so utterly taken aback that he could only ejaculate that one word. The last person in the world he should have expected to fly in his face like that was the gentle, loving Gwendolyn, whose devotion to him he had believed boundless. He could not understand it.

"Gwendolyn!" he repeated once again.

"Well," she answered, speaking clearly and steadily, though her heart beat as if it would choke her. "Have I said anything so very strange?"

"Yes, indeed you have. You astonish me more than I can say. I thought you loved me."

"I do! I do!"

She could not repress that one cry which came from the bottom of her bleeding heart; but the accent of pain did not touch his compassion. His self-love was wounded, and he was determined she should be made to feel her unfeeling disloyalty.

"It is a poor sort of love that cannot make one little sacrifice. Evidently, I stand second to Wylmington."

Gwendolyn wrung her hands together, struggled for composure, and struggled successfully.

"You do not understand," she said. "I am not thinking of Wylmington, but of you. I would marry you, love you, live for you, if you were a beggar, an outcast, an alien from all. No misfortune, no poverty could stand between us; the more you needed my love and care, the more happy should I be to give them. But you—you do not care to marry me unless I can bring a dowry with me. You love wealth and fame better than you love me; and I cannot bear that."

Sir Kenrick started to his feet.

"Really, Gwendolyn, you would try the patience of a saint. Can nothing make you see that life is not and cannot be all sickly sentiment and lovers' vows? There is a practical side to every question, and just now it is of the first importance that we should look at things in a practical way. We have had our full allowance of spooning, and more. I, at least, have had enough of it for the present. Love is not the only thing in the world worth talking of and thinking about. We cannot live on kisses and sugared words, as you might have learned by this time, and the question which now stares us in the face is, how are we to live?"

Careless, impatient words, showing only too clearly the selfish calibre of the man's nature. Did he know how they stabbed the heart of his listener, stabbing out the life of the idol she had enshrined there so long?

Intensity of pain, the desperation of her despair, gave Gwendolyn calmness and strength.

"How are we to live, Sir Kenrick?" she asked quietly. "As we have done before, I think. You had better go your way—I mine."

He turned and stared at her, and then broke into the same uneasy laugh.

"Cool!" he said.

"It is your choice, not mine," she said quietly. "It is you who do not choose to marry a poor woman."

"You need not be a poor woman unless you choose," he retorted quickly.

But she noticed that he made no refutation of the charge, tacitly admitting that he did not choose to marry a poor woman.

"But I do choose to be poor," she answered, with a quiet dignity that took him somewhat aback. "If it is my fortune, not me you loved, say so at once—and go."

"If it is your estate, and not me you love, I had better go," he answered. But his eyes could not meet hers; he knew that it was his doing, not hers, this parting.

"Yes," she answered steadily, "you had better go."

He rose; but yet he could not go, for in his own selfish fashion he loved her still.

"Gwendolyn," he said, and his tone made her quiver in every limb, "and is it all to end like this?"

"There seems no other way," she answered faintly.

"Yes, it is better so."

"And once you loved me!"

"Once!"

"Gwendolyn," he cried suddenly, "let us forget all

this!—it is but a lovers' quarrel after all; let us treat it as such, and forget it. Come to me again. Be my own love—my wife. Can you not trust me even in such a little thing as the management of our joint property?"

He spoke tenderly, playfully, with just that tinge of loving authority which was hardest to resist; but though sorely tempted, Gwendolyn remained firm.

"Kenrick," she said, "you have but just reminded me that life is not all sentiment, and that love has already palled upon you. If we cannot agree over practical matters, it is well to find it out early instead of late. Your love, it seems, would hardly be strong enough to cover a multitude of differences. After what has passed between us, things cannot be as they were before. I cannot forget, if you can. I cannot come to you again. I cannot be your wife."

Hurt, angry, ashamed, indignant, Sir Kenrick Dalrymple was little to be envied. His suffering was far less than that of the noble-hearted woman he had so cruelly wronged. Yet his compassion was all for himself; he had only anger for her.

"Little you care for me! Fine ending to all your professions! You cast me off like an old glove, now that you want to repair your broken fortunes by a brilliant marriage. I wish you well, Miss Maltby. I hope you may delude some higher game than a penniless baronet; and I hope, when you are lavishing your vows of love and fidelity upon him, that somebody may whisper to him how much those vows are worth."

With these bitter, cruel words he left her; and

Gwendolyn crawled slowly upstairs to her own room, which she did not leave for many days.

Lady Allardice was excessively annoyed by the whole turn affairs had taken these past few days.

Of all things in the world, she hated a social failure; and a failure poor Gwendolyn most certainly was at this juncture.

Six months ago she had come to her aunt's house a beautiful young heiress, whom any man might be proud to woo and to win; and as she was utterly unsophisticated in the ways of the world, Lady Allardice had believed that she should be able to mould her fortunes at will, and make her her son's wife without any great difficulty.

Thankful enough now that she had not succeeded in doing this, Lady Allardice still found it hard to forgive her niece for having foiled her; and now that Gwendolyn had made an utter failure of her own affairs—had lost her fortune, her good looks, her health, and her lover—now that she was reduced to the level of social misfortune and mediocrity, her aunt was only desirous of getting rid of her as quietly and decently as possible.

To take the miserable, white-faced, obstinate girl to Condoover, she was determined not to do. Gwendolyn had no claim upon them; and she certainly would decline to burden herself with a young woman who persisted in being poor when she might be rich, and who had made such a terrible *fiasco* of her affairs as to be thrown over by her lover within six weeks of their engagement. Gwendolyn had made her own bed, and she



must lie upon it. She had declined to have her affairs directed by others, so she must manage them for herself. There was no reason at all why the Allardice family should be burdened by this miserable failure, and the sooner she was quietly told that she could not accompany them to Condoover Castle the better. Lady Allardice considered that she had done her duty nobly as it was. She was not prepared to make any further sacrifices.

Sir Frederic was as wax in his wife's hands. Whatever she planned, he agreed to; and so long as he had no personal trouble in the matter, he cared no whit how such a question might be settled. He was sorry for his niece; but she was acting very foolishly in declining to sell her property, and she must take the consequences of her own wilfulness.

Lady Allardice sought the darkened room, and found Gwendolyn lying upon her bed in listless dejection, as she had been doing for several days now. Mind and body seemed alike worn out by the struggle of the past week; and she could neither sleep, nor think, nor speak, but lie still in a kind of torpor, which brought neither rest nor refreshment.

"Well, Gwendolyn, my dear, how are you?"

"Much the same, thank you."

"I am sorry you do not try to rouse yourself. This giving way does no good, and is very bad for you."

"I can't help it," answered Gwendolyn listlessly.

"Well, my dear, you will have to rouse yourself, for you must make some plans about your future. What

do you propose doing when we leave town next week?"

Gwendolyn's eyes opened wider now.

"I thought I was going with you to Condoover."

"So did I, my dear, a week ago. We all thought so; but affairs have put on quite a different aspect since then, you know."

"Yes; but about Condoover—"

"About Condoover? you must see how impossible it is for me to ask you there. You know, my dear child, how sincerely I love you; but I have my duties as a mother to think of. So long as your engagement lasted, I was not afraid for my poor Bernard; and, besides, he kept out of the way, as you have seen. But at Condoover he will always be at home, and I cannot subject him to the treatment he has received once at your hands. I have not come here to reproach you. All that is past and over, and I trust I never bear malice. Your inexperience, not your heart, was in fault, as I have always said; and I am sure you are sufficiently punished for having scorned an honest love for that of a fortune-hunter. Still facts are facts, and I have my duties as a mother to study; and, of course, you cannot but see that it is impossible for me to ask you under existing circumstances to accompany us to Condoover."

Gwendolyn was roused to some purpose. She was now finding with a vengeance what was the true worth of the love of the world.

"I see, Aunt Allardice," she answered quietly. "I will make different arrangements."

"What do you propose to do, dear?"

"I will tell you in a few days. I cannot make plans all in a minute."

Lady Allardice saw that she was not to be taken into her niece's confidence, so she rose and bestowed a good many embraces upon her.

"This is a sad conclusion to all my loving plans and hopes for you, dearest; but we must hope for better days in the future. If my poor boy marries, or takes to travel round the world, or anything like that, you must come to us again as a daughter. I shall always feel the same love for you as for my other dear girls; and I am sadly put out by the way things have fallen. It is such a grief to have to part from those we love; but, of course, you must see—"

"Oh yes, I see," answered Gwendolyn wearily; and by-and-by she added, "Can I see Mr. Carlingford, Aunt Allardice?"

"No, dear; he is ill. Did you not hear?—Typhoid fever, caught in some low den. I shall be thankful to get my Cicely away to Condoover. Would you like to see one of the curates?"

"No, thank you," and the light which had suddenly dawned in her eyes as suddenly expired.

"Did she want to join a sisterhood?" said Lady Allardice to herself. "Well, really, at such a juncture she might do worse."

When Gwendolyn was alone she sat down to write to Cynthia, who had been detained at Tremain by an indisposition of her husband. She was not a good cor-

respondent, but she never wrote without expressing a wish to see Gwendolyn, although so far she had never given her a formal invitation to visit her.

But Gwendolyn knew that she and Cynthia were in sympathy, and she feared no rebuff at her hands. She poured out to her, in a long passionate letter, all her misery, her darkness of soul, her black despair. There was no light, no hope for her now in this world or the next, so she told Cynthia; and when her letter was ended she buried her face in her hands and burst into passionate weeping.

In due course Cynthia's answer came, short and to the point, like her words:—

“Come to me, and make my home yours as long as you will. Perhaps we may be able to comfort each other.”

Lady Allardice was not particularly pleased to hear that Tremain was to be Gwendolyn's destination—she had not been invited herself to visit Cynthia in her married home—but, of course, she could say nothing against the arrangement.

Cicely was glad, sincerely glad, for she knew that Cynthia understood Gwendolyn better than any one else. In her own quiet way she had felt very much for her cousin in her trouble; but she could not give expression to her sympathy, and she was not one who could bring the light to shine into the darkness of a human soul.

And in deep darkness Gwendolyn went out into the new life that lay before her.

## CHAPTER XX.

### AT TREMAIN.

"GWENDOLYN!"—"Cynthia!"

The young countess stood in her great drawing-room, magnificent with its amber brocade hangings, its huge mirrors, and costly pictures and ornaments. She looked sligher and more youthful than before, amid so much that was grand and stately; but the quiet dignity of her manner well became her position, and every one accorded to her this meed of praise, that, in spite of her youth, she was "every inch a countess."

"Dear Gwendolyn, I am so glad to see you again."

"Cynthia! Cynthia!" Gwendolyn clung to her cousin, as a man clings to the plank which lies between him and death, and a tearless sob broke from her.

"Poor child, you are tired out and overwrought," said Cynthia tenderly. "Come, I will take you to my own little sanctum. You will soon be better."

Lady Tremain's little sanctum was an octagonal apartment, exquisitely furnished, with two windows facing each other, one of which commanded a lovely view over miles of undulating wooded park and country,

whilst the other looked far over the shining sea, and brought into view the fine outlines of the magnificent Devonshire coast.

To Gwendolyn, just escaped from the noise and heat and glare of London, the scene seemed one of exquisite peace and beauty.

"O Cynthia!" she exclaimed, with another long-drawn gasp, "I feel as if I should be able to breathe now."

"Sit down, child," said Cynthia quietly, unloosing the clasp of her cousin's light travelling-cloak. "Sit down and drink your tea, and rest yourself. We can talk by-and-by. You are not fit for it yet."

Gwendolyn submitted, as she always did, to Cynthia's quiet authority. She sipped her tea, looking out towards the shining sea, and through the open casement the plash of the waves fell like music upon her ear. Overwrought as she was, almost tired of her life, such a scene and such a sound had still power to rest and refresh her.

Soon, however, her eyes turned towards her hostess. She thought, with a curious sense of having lived this scene once before, of her first *tête-à-tête* tea with Cynthia six months before, on her arrival at Grosvenor Square under Lady Allardice's protection.

Cynthia sat in one of her own graceful, pensive attitudes, her hand resting lightly upon the head of a magnificent deer-hound, which lay at her feet, looking up at her with a world of devotion in its expressive brown eyes. Was her face more thin than of old?

Had it aged in its expression whilst retaining its youthful purity of outline? Pale, Cynthia had always been; but surely the slight bloom she once had boasted had all gone; and were not the shadows under her eyes more heavy than of yore, although the eyes themselves seemed to shine with an added brilliancy?

Had these changes really taken place? or was it merely the result of a two months' separation, which had dimmed Gwendolyn's memory?

She herself could not decide; and whilst she was pondering over the question, Cynthia suddenly raised her eyes and encountered the steady, puzzled gaze fastened upon her. She smiled slightly, and said,—

"Well, Gwendolyn?"

"I was looking at you, Cynthia."

"I am aware of it."

"I do not think you are looking very well."

"I might return the compliment."

Gwendolyn sighed. It seemed to her that she had cause enough to warrant such a change.

"Poor little girl!" said Cynthia quietly. "We will talk your troubles over some day soon, but not to-day. To-day you are not to think about them—I forbid it. Tell me, instead, how they all are at Grosvenor Square—mamma, and papa, and Cicely."

"Cicely looks pale and tired; the others are as usual."

"Poor Cicely! how she hates the life we lead! Looking back, I wonder we did not associate more; but we never did quite hit it off, though I find I am fonder of her than I once thought. I should like to have her

here; but I should not know what to do with her. She will be happier at Condover."

"Yes."

"And so mamma could not take you there on account of poor, dear Bernard," remarked Cynthia slowly. "How like mamma!"

Gwendolyn was silent for a minute, and then said,—

"I am glad now she couldn't."

"You would rather be here, you mean?"

"O Cynthia, yes!"

Cynthia smiled, and then her face grew more grave than before.

"I daresay you wondered why I did not ask you down before?"

"No, indeed."

"I wanted you many times," and Cynthia sighed rather wearily; "but it seemed selfish to ask you when you were so happy. We are very dull and quiet here. You know Tremain has not been well."

"I know. I was so sorry and disappointed about it—your not coming to town, I mean; but he is better now, isn't he?"

"Yes, decidedly better; but we are not inviting any company yet. I hope you will not find it very dull here, Gwendolyn."

"Oh no!" she answered quickly and earnestly. "I want quiet, and you above all things, Cynthia. You cannot guess what peace it seems to be here, away from everything. But what is the matter with Lord Tremain?"



"A very slight seizure, I believe—paralytic in character, you understand. He was ill only for a week, and seemed to recover fairly fast; but I think it has left him feeble. He seems to me to have lost power to a considerable extent, and not to regain it. I fancy you will think him a good deal changed."

"I am sorry, Cynthia," said Gwendolyn in a voice of concern.

"Yes; I knew you would be sorry."

"He seemed such a fine strong man, and so young for his years."

"Yes, so he was. That is just what makes the change so noticeable; but you know he is sixty-five really, and now I think he begins to look it."

"But he will be himself again when he has recovered altogether," said Gwendolyn reassuringly.

"Ah, when!" returned Cynthia quietly. "But the doctors warn me frankly, and one's own common sense tells one plainly, that when a man of his age and constitution begins to break up, a real rally is seldom made."

"Cynthia!"

"Oh, there is nothing to take alarm at exactly. His health is good and his constitution tough. He will take a great deal of wearing out. Still this stroke may be followed by others, and he may possibly lose his faculties to a great extent. I do not know why the doctors should expect it in his case; but they evidently do, or they would hardly have been so explicit with me. However, we need not trouble our heads over the future. At present matters are not specially serious."

Gwendolyn's face looked grave. Was this to be the end of Cynthia's brilliant marriage? To be shut up in an out-of-the-way castle upon the Devonshire coast with a feeble paralytic? The picture flashed vividly upon her brain, and then slowly faded. Perhaps it was an idle, foolish fear.

So the pair sat in thoughtful silence until the hound pricked his ears and lifted his head.

"He hears some one coming," observed Cynthia then. "Most likely it is Tremain."

Cynthia was right. In a few seconds the door opened and admitted the old earl.

"My dear young lady, I am charmed to welcome you to Tremain," said he in his suave, courtly way; but he bent over to kiss his young wife the moment he had shaken hands with his guest. "Cynthia will be delighted to have her companion and friend again. I tell her she is looking pale. Do you not think so too, Miss Maltby? Our sea air ought to give her rosier cheeks and put more flesh on her bones than it does, I tell her."

Cynthia smiled saucily at her husband, and lifted one white hand as if to check him.

"Tremain, you must keep your uncomplimentary remarks to yourself, or reserve them for our private interviews. I object to have my personal defects pointed out in that open and candid way of yours. If you cannot admire me yourself, you must not hinder the rest of the world from doing so."

Lord Tremain laughed, and shook his head, looking with unequivocal admiration at his wife.

"You see she can always get the best of me still," he said, appealing to Gwendolyn. "I mayn't even say what I like. I've no will of my own allowed me now."

"No; and a very good thing for you too," quoth Cynthia. "A man must expect to give up something when he marries. I gave you fair warning that I meant to have my own way, so you have no right to complain, my lord."

To judge by the radiant expression of my lord's face, he had not the faintest desire to grumble. He looked supremely content with himself and every one else; indeed, Gwendolyn had seldom seen a happier-looking countenance, and was inwardly wondering at the change which had passed over it during the past months.

Cynthia was right in what she had said. Lord Tremain had aged very much; and not even his intense contentment and satisfaction could conceal the deepened lines upon his face, the whiteness of the hair about the temples, the slight tremulousness of the lips when he spoke or smiled. He stooped now when he walked, and he had lost the strong military carriage which had given him so distinguished an air. He looked quite the old man now, about whom whispers might easily begin to circulate that he was "breaking up."

But whether or not this was the case, whether he was strong or weak, old or youthful for his years, one thing was self-evident—his devotion to his young wife had never changed or wavered. His love had grown

and flourished in the midst of bodily infirmities, and after a two months' trial of married life, he adored his wife with even greater fervour than he had done upon his wedding-day. Gwendolyn marked this with joy.

"I think she cannot be unhappy in the light of such a love as that," thought Gwendolyn wistfully. "And I think she must love him a little to make him so happy."

"Would you like to take a turn upon the terrace before dinner, Gwendolyn," asked Cynthia, "and get a breath of sea air?—Tremain, you are not to come. You have tired yourself enough already by your ride. We shall not be gone a quarter of an hour. You must rest now, and you shall tell me all about your adventures whilst we dress.—Come, Gwendolyn; this is my magic door and stair-way, which Tremain devised so as to give me easy access to the terrace below."

A door, that did not look like a door, opened at a touch, and disclosed a little light iron staircase, which wound round the outside of the turret, and led on to the wide terrace below, against which, at high spring-tides, the waves thundered and beat, dashing their foam over the grey walls of the castle.

This evening, however, all was still and calm. The sea shone like molten gold in the last rays of the sun, and the fresh salt crispness of the air brought with it a sense of vitality and power to which Gwendolyn had been a stranger for many a long day.

"O Cynthia!" she exclaimed, drawing a long breath,

"it is so good to be here with you again. How peaceful it all is! How happy you must be!"

"You mean to be happy here with us, my Golden Gwendolyn? Good child."

"If I can," she answered, the sad look of vain longing stealing into her eyes again; "but it will not be very easy—for me."

"Not at first; but you will grow used to the pain. We all feel as if it could never leave us at first; but it does in time, or else we grow so used to it that we do not heed it."

"Mine must be worse, I think, than yours was," said Gwendolyn thoughtfully. With Cynthia's arm linked in hers, it seemed impossible to keep away from the subject so near her heart.

"Yes?"

"Because, you see, he proved himself so unworthy. I could have borne anything but that—separation, anything—if only he had been noble and as I had pictured; but now—"

"He is not even worthy of a regret. Gwendolyn, believe me, that although it seems the worse pain at the time, in the end the cure will be more rapid and more complete."

Gwendolyn shook her head mournfully.

"I did so trust him—so loved him."

"It is a great mistake for a woman ever to love too deeply," said Cynthia. "A little love is all very well; but it should never be more than a little, and should always be kept well in hand." Then, after a pause, she

added, "I never much liked your Kenrick, Gwendolyn, though I did not think him quite such a cur as he proved himself."

"Don't!" cried Gwendolyn quickly.

"My dear," returned Lady Tremain in her quiet way, "I am not going to allow you to cherish any sentimental regrets on Sir Kenrick Dalrymple's account. You have acted, so far as I could gather from your letter, very well and very boldly. You have shown him what the value of his professed love was worth; and having declined so worthless an article, you have regained your freedom. All this is very well done; and you shall not now spoil the effect of your courage by entertaining tender feelings towards the memory of a man who has behaved to you so ill."

"He did love me, Cynthia, indeed he did," pleaded Gwendolyn, "but—"

"Exactly so; men always do love with a 'but.' It is only we poor, foolish women who give our all in return for what they choose to offer us."

"Always, Cynthia? surely not always."

"No, perhaps not. The exceptions, however, only serve to prove the rule. Sir Kenrick did not happen to be an exception, you see."

"If you did not like him, why did you not warn me?"

"Because I had no wish to alienate your affection by gratuitous information which would only confirm your infatuation. My dear Gwendolyn, I know a little too much of the world ever to interfere in other people's love affairs."

If Gwendolyn thought Cynthia a little wanting in tenderness and sympathy, at least she felt braced up to a certain extent by this little passage of arms upon the sea-girt terrace. Thinking the matter over in the quiet of her great state bedroom, almost regally magnificent, she came to the conclusion that Cynthia had done her more good by her little sarcastic speeches than she could have effected by kissing and crying over her.

The stately dinner in the great dining-room (which was, however, only the "small dining-room" of the castle), with the picturesque servants treading softly hither and thither with powdered heads, yellow plush breeches, and silk stockings, the quiet dignity of the young countess in her own house, and the urbanity of Lord Tremain, all served to rouse and distract Gwendolyn from the contemplation of her own grief; and upon the first night of her sojourn at Tremain she slept soundly and well.

## CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. KNOLLYS.

"WOULD you like to ride this morning, Gwendolyn?" asked Cynthia upon the following day. "We can give you a good mount, and the country is very pretty."

"Are you going to ride?"

"No. Tremain will want me this morning. The bailiff is coming up on business, and I have to be present now, as my husband is liable to grow confused without me. In the afternoon we will drive; but I think a ride would do you good this morning"

"I should enjoy it very much," said Gwendolyn with some little animation.

"And if you felt disposed, you might look in upon Mrs. Knollys as you come back. She lives four miles from here; and she would take it as a delicate attention if you paid your respects to her early."

"Mrs. Knollys!"

"Yes; did you not know that she lived in this part of the world? She is much interested in you. Of course she would call upon you in a day or two in the



order of things ; but one need not stand on ceremony with one's aunt."

"Aunt!" echoed Gwendolyn. "Mrs. Knollys! What do you mean, Cynthia?"

"Surely, my dear child, you know that your mother and mine had an elder sister, Mrs. Knollys, who lived all her married life abroad on account of her husband's delicate health?"

"Yes, I just knew so much; but I don't know her, nor anything about her."

"No, nor did we very much. I never saw her except at long intervals until I came here. I have seen a little more of her since; for when her husband died she came and settled here, and here she has been living for seven or eight years."

"I have never seen her," said Gwendolyn. "Papa did not know her at all. She was abroad when he married, and mamma had been dead years and years before she came back."

"Yes, I know. She was very fond of your mother, I am told; but I am sure she and mamma have never hit it off together. I am not going to say whether that is, or is not, a recommendation in Aunt Knollys' favour. You may form your own conclusions there. Any way she will be delighted to see you."

"Do you like her, Cynthia?" asked Gwendolyn.

Cynthia smiled in rather a peculiar fashion.

"The same old Gwendolyn, so fond of simple, pointed questions. My feelings must be of a far more complex nature than yours, I think; for I cannot analyze

them, as you seem to expect, into simple likes and dislikes."

Gwendolyn's face expressed slight disappointment.

"I suppose you mean by that that you do not like her. I am sorry. I should so like to have a nice kind aunt to love."

Cynthia smiled, more at what was implied in these words than by what they actually expressed.

"My dear child, how you do jump to conclusions. If you must learn the state of my feelings towards Mrs. Knollys, it is something like this: I do like her, and I have a great esteem for her; but she strikes me as being a woman who knows a little too much about one's state of mind, and she stirs up within me a certain little demon, who is always ready to wake into activity, and between them they make me say and do things not altogether according to my convictions or principles. No doubt you are somewhat mystified by all this. Perhaps when you have seen us together you may understand better."

So Gwendolyn rode out not greatly enlightened by what she had heard of Mrs. Knollys, yet fully determined to pay her aunt a morning visit before she returned to the castle.

The country was, as Cynthia had said, very beautiful, with that combination of wooded inland loveliness and grandeur of coast-line so characteristic of Devonshire.

Gwendolyn rode for many miles along the coast before she turned her horse's head inland; and as she paced along she fell into a reverie of no very cheerful kind.

The change and excitement of the visit to Tremain, and Cynthia's loving welcome, had done her good. But dark thoughts and desponding doubts could not be got rid of, even though they might be pushed on one side for a time; and as Gwendolyn rode through the green lanes, and saw the smiling summer loveliness of all around her, her heart grew more and more heavy within her.

All sense of gladness and hope and happiness had left her now. She could not understand how she had once been so full of joy and confidence. She thought with wonder of her former state of mind, trying to recall what it was had made her glad at heart, and failing to comprehend her past state of mind.

"I was happy because I was convinced that God really was God," she said slowly to herself; "but I can't see how that could make me feel as I did. I know it well enough now, but it does not make things any better. I thought, when we loved God, he took care of us and our affairs, and kept troubles away. But he did not do anything of that kind for me; and I cannot feel as I did when I was confirmed, and everything looked bright before me. I wish I could, for I was very happy; but I cannot at all understand how it was I felt so. I believe just the same as I did then; but all the reality seems to have gone out of it now."

Thus musing, Gwendolyn pursued the windings of the lane, until they led her into a picturesque little village, which she recognized from Cynthia's description as the one near to which Mrs. Knollys' house stood.

The groom pointed out the road, and in a few minutes Gwendolyn caught glimpses between the sheltering trees of a warm, red-brick, gabled house, all overgrown with climbing plants, which stood back some five or six hundred yards from the road, and was approached by an avenue of fine old lime trees and a beautifully kept drive.

"Ask if Mrs. Knollys is at home," said Gwendolyn to the man, as he held open the gate between the drive and the garden. "Say it is Miss Maltby."

She reined in her horse a little way from the picturesque old house, and looked up at its latticed windows and twisted chimneys, with a mixture of languid curiosity and absence of mind.

She herself looked sufficiently picturesque, sitting her horse with the grace of long use to the saddle; the sunshine showing up the fine proportions of her figure, which the dark, close-fitting habit showed off to advantage, and throwing into striking contrast the brightness of her abundant golden hair.

"Gwendolyn! Surely it is Gwendolyn!" said a voice from behind—a voice which seemed at once strange and familiar to the girl.

The voice did not come from the house, towards which she was looking, where the man was speaking at the porch with a rosy-cheeked country maid in spotless cap and apron. The exclamation was uttered from somebody behind, and turning suddenly, Gwendolyn saw a lady, whom she knew must be her aunt, emerge into the sunshine from behind a mass of rhododendron and azalea shrubs.

Gwendolyn felt at a glance that she had never before seen anybody quite like her aunt.

Mrs. Knollys was of medium height and slight of figure, and she was well and picturesquely dressed in some soft black clinging texture, over which, as she had been at work in her garden, she had put a great white apron frilled at the edges. She held in her hands her brown leather gauntleted gloves, and over the piles of her snowy hair a piece of black lace had been thrown as a protection from the sun.

She looked, as she was, a woman advanced in years; and yet her face was full of light and of power, her eye was bright and penetrating, and her features were undeniably fine and handsome. She looked like one who has lived through change and trouble, who has faced even danger and death, and who has come out from the trial unscathed and triumphant.

Certainly, Gwendolyn's aunt was utterly different in appearance from anything she had so far pictured; and the girl felt a certain odd nervousness in her presence which was not usual with her.

"I think I cannot be mistaken," said Mrs. Knollys, advancing out from the shadow. "Surely you must be Gwendolyn Maltby?"

"Yes, I am Gwendolyn," answered the girl, slipping from her saddle. "You are my Aunt Knollys?"

Both the girl's hands were held in a very warm clasp. The bright eyes fixed upon her were suddenly filled with tears. Gwendolyn was touched, and bent her head to kiss her aunt. Her kiss was warmly returned.

"My dear," said her aunt, and the clear voice trembled a little, although the words were distinctly enunciated—"my dear, it is twenty-seven years ago this month that another Gwendolyn, with golden hair and earnest eyes, rode over to say good-bye to a sister who was just about to leave the country. The last time I saw her she was sitting her horse just as you were sitting it now, waiting for the last smile, the last look. That Gwendolyn was your mother, my fair young sister, whom I loved like a daughter. Has any one ever told you how like you are to her?"

"Papa used to say I was growing like her," and then Gwendolyn's own eyes filled with sudden tears.

Mrs. Knollys kissed her again, and led her towards the house, for the heat of the sun, as noon approached, was waxing fierce.

The house felt cool and dim; and although Gwendolyn's eyes were half dazzled by tears, she could still see and admire the quaint, old-fashioned refinement of everything within, and the antique beauty of the furniture, the hangings, and the ornaments which adorned every available space.

"You shall come into my 'willow-pattern parlour,'" said Mrs. Knollys, leading the way, "for it is the coolest place in the house. Your horse shall go to the stable, and I shall keep you here a prisoner till the sun has lost a little of its power. My dear child, I must look at you again. Gwendolyn!—little Gwendolyn grown to what my Gwendolyn of past days used to be!"

Gwendolyn submitted without much protest ; she only said inquiringly,—

“What will Cynthia say?”

“Cynthia will arrive at a true conclusion when you do not turn up for lunch. She knows how I have longed to see you.”

Gwendolyn smiled. It was pleasant to hear that any one had longed for her.

“And when did you arrive at Tremain?”

“Yesterday evening.”

“And came over to see me this morning! My dear, I am very much obliged to you.”

The simple sincerity of the words brought a sense of gladness to Gwendolyn's heart.

“Cynthia said she thought you would like me to come,” said the girl. “I did not know how near you lived to Tremain, Aunt Knollys.”

“I would rather you called me Aunt Magdalene, if you don't mind. It will be more like the name your dear mother used to use. I was many years older than my sisters, and had a good deal of authority over them. Gwendolyn used always to call me Sister Magdalene.”

Gwendolyn smiled. She liked to hear her mother spoken of like this. She had never had any one before to tell her of her sayings and doings. Her father could not bear to touch upon the subject ; her Aunt Allardice had taken no interest in it.

“You see, my dear,” pursued Mrs. Knollys, “that although I have had three nieces for a long while, I have never known anything of them ; so that now two

are, as it were, within my power, I mean to make the most of my opportunities."

Gwendolyn looked up as if she meant to speak, but then she abandoned the attempt and remained silent. It seemed as if Mrs. Knollys had read in her eyes the unspoken thought.

"Were you going to ask why it was I know so little of my own relatives? The question is soon answered. Circumstances kept me away for very many years; and when I could have made acquaintance, the way did not open in any very favourable manner. I did see your cousins occasionally; but your father was a recluse, and I saw full well that my presence at Wylmington would not be welcome. My dear, do not look distressed. It was no slight to me; it was chiefly due to your dear father's great love that he could not welcome his dead wife's relatives to his home. I always held your father in high esteem, and in due time I should have asked, and in all probability obtained, permission for you to visit me. But his death put an end to these thoughts. Ah! Gwendolyn, you little knew how I yearned over you then—how I longed to come to you and comfort you."

Gwendolyn looked up wistfully.

"I wish you had done that."

"Thank you, my dear. If I had known in time I might perhaps have done so; but the papers gave me my first intimation of the event, and I knew you would have your Aunt Allardice by that time."

"I didn't know where you lived," said Gwendolyn, with some compunction.



"I know you did not. You knew your Aunt Allardice, and you did not know me. Strangers are not welcome at such a time. But I was sorely tempted to write and ask you to come and spend the first three months of your orphaned life under my roof."

"O Aunt Magdalene, I wish you had!" cried Gwendolyn impulsively.

Mrs. Knollys smiled.

"You would not have come, my dear. Your other aunt's claim would have prevailed, and she had the prior right. Consideration convinced me of that; and I knew how little I had to offer a young girl in comparison with the attractions of London life."

"Ah, Aunt Magdalene, if you only knew how miserable and hollow it all is!"

"What is?"

"Oh, that dreadful London life!"

Mrs. Knollys smiled once more, and laid her hand with gentle touch upon Gwendolyn's.

"My dear," she said, in her gently impressive way, "I am not going to lecture you, or preach to you, or even argue with you to-day; but I must tell you this one thing, and you may make of it what you can,—no life is of necessity miserable or hollow. If it is so, it is not the life which is in fault, but our own selves."

"But, Aunt Magdalene—"

"No, dear child, not to-day. Turn over the idea in your mind, and we will discuss it some other time. But do not forget this fact: it is God who gives us each our place in the world, and allots our lives to us. It is not

his will that one should be miserable or hollow, and therefore they never can be so, unless by our own doing."

Gwendolyn was silent; but after a little pause she said bitterly,—

"I have had so much trouble."

Mrs. Knollys looked into her sad young face with eyes which expressed far more sympathy than did her next words.

"And you think trouble is a very bad thing?"

"I suppose every one does that," Gwendolyn answered with some surprise.

"No, not all of us; not when we have grown old enough to see our lives in perspective."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if a life could pass without a trouble, that life could hardly be worth the living."

Gwendolyn lifted her eyebrows, and then said in a sort of weary, dejected fashion,—

"I know people say things like that. I suppose they think it is right, or consolatory, or something; but I never fancy they quite believe or mean what they say themselves— I beg your pardon, aunt; I was not thinking of you."

"I know you were not; and if you were, I would much rather you should speak frankly to me. I do not mean to let you talk or think too much to-day. You are weary and overdone as it is, and must rest awhile before you are fit for any sort of battle; but look at me, my dear, and tell me—do you think I would willingly and deliberately deceive you?"

"I am sure you would not."

"Then look at me still whilst I go on to tell you, that although I have had more troubles to bear than falls, I think, to the lot of most women (some day I will tell you my life's history if you care to hear it), I would not, if I could, spare myself one of those troubles; I would not have my life changed in one of its bearings; I would not, even if I saw it looming before me, try to escape from the shadow of some great calamity. I think I should not even wish to do so."

"But why not? I do not understand. What good can troubles bring?"

"They bring us nearer to God," answered Mrs. Knollys quietly. "They are sent from him for that purpose. They are God's messengers, and as such should not be feared or hated, even if the news they bring seems to be evil."

Gwendolyn sighed.

"Mine have not brought me nearer God; they have only hidden him further away."

Mrs. Knollys pressed her niece's hand and said,—

"We will talk about all that too in due time. We cannot always see clearly whilst the shadow is passing over us."

And then Mrs. Knollys bestirred herself to entertain her young guest and bring back the smiles to her pale face. She showed her her curious old house, with all its antique treasures and old-fashioned china and furniture; and after their simple midday meal, she took her round the garden, showed her flowers, her bees, her poultry;

and Gwendolyn, who had lived all her early life amid such things, was pleased and interested by all she saw.

When she got back to Tremain she was able to tell Cynthia that she had had a pleasant visit, and that she liked her aunt very much.

"I fancied she would suit you," was Cynthia's rejoinder, but she declined to explain herself further.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A TALK WITH CYNTHIA.

"I AM afraid you will find life at Tremain dreadfully dull, Gwendolyn," said Cynthia to her cousin upon the fifth morning of her visit. "That is why I did not ask you here before."

"I like the quiet, thank you," answered Gwendolyn, with a somewhat languid smile; "and I always like being with you, Cynthia."

"I am not good company for you just now," said the young countess, who looked unusually pale and listless that morning. "It is not always well for birds of a feather to flock together."

It was a dispiriting day, certainly, as far as the outside world was concerned. A heavy sea-fog lay upon the land, blotting out all its features, and revealing only a blurred outline of the nearer trees and dense shrubberies which lay around the house. As for the sea itself, it was entirely obscured, and its neighbourhood was made known only by the sullen boom and hiss of the waves as they washed up against the base of the crags on which the castle stood.

"Sometimes it goes on like this for days and days," said Cynthia, looking out with a little shiver upon the blank, featureless world without. "Let us go into the small drawing-room, Gwendolyn, and light the fire. A day like this makes one think of November, not August. I can't bear to be on the sea-side of the house when that sullen booming is going on. Tremain is a dreary place in weather like this."

Gwendolyn could not but assent. She did not wish herself elsewhere; the dreariness seemed to suit her present mood better than a brighter atmosphere would have done. She was in that morbid state of mind when solitary brooding was more to her taste than any attempt to rouse herself or to struggle against such feelings would have been; and Cynthia's languid, silent sympathy suited her better than anything else.

They retreated from the turret-room and the moaning of the sea, and settled themselves by the bright fire in the smallest of the great drawing-rooms, feeling a sense of pleasure in the heat and brightness diffused by the crackling logs.

Gwendolyn was quite content to remain indoors to-day and talk with Cynthia, of whom she had not felt to have seen very much since her arrival.

The first days had been so bright and fine that she had spent them for the most part wandering about the fine old park and along the wind-swept cliff-paths. After the confinement of town, this liberty was a keen pleasure, the more so as these rambles gave her ample time for solitary meditation.

Cynthia did not walk or ride with her. She said her husband wanted her; and when she drove out with her cousin, Lord Tremain always accompanied them. In fact, he did not seem really happy out of sight of his wife; and so it happened that Gwendolyn felt to have had very little of Cynthia's society during these first days of her visit.

In Lord Tremain's presence his wife looked bright and spoke cheerfully and playfully. With him it was the old Cynthia he had known and courted early in the year, who teased or petted, coaxed or defied him. If any change had passed upon her, he was barely conscious of it—only conscious of a certain pallor of the cheek, of an occasional languid weariness of manner. Not for a moment did he suppose that any real change had passed over her; yet Gwendolyn, looking at her again and again that morning, as she lay back in her low chair with half-closed eyes, and thin hands almost too languid to caress the head of her faithful hound, felt more and more convinced that something was amiss.

"Cynthia, I don't think you are well."

Cynthia opened her eyes and looked at Gwendolyn with one of her inscrutable glances.

"I don't think this place suits me particularly well."

"Then why do you stay?"

"Oh, Tremain likes it; he is happy here."

"He would not be happy if he thought it was making you ill."

"I am not ill; and it will be less relaxing when the summer has gone."

"You ought not to wait for that. Lord Tremain would take you away directly, if he knew the place did not suit you."

"Oh, it's not the place," returned Cynthia. "Tremain is as good as anywhere else. Better leave well alone. I was thankful enough to get here after the wedding-tour. Now that Tremain has lost his power of managing things, so that all would devolve upon me, I wouldn't move for anything."

Gwendolyn looked unhappy and dissatisfied. She did not like Cynthia's tone. She drew up her chair closer, and said pleadingly,—

"Cynthia, please tell me—don't be angry with me for asking—are you very unhappy?"

"Oh no; not at all."

"But you cannot be happy?"

"Oh no. Who is?"

Gwendolyn did not feel equal to answer that question, but she pursued her own thought.

"In London you were not particularly happy, Cynthia—sometimes, I think, you were quite unhappy; but you were not like this."

"No, not quite."

"Then what makes the difference?"

"I don't know exactly. I suppose that so long as there is an element of uncertainty in the future, one always indulges a fond belief in some golden possibility. Gradually experience dispels these; and when the last illusion vanishes, life looks a little flat."

Gwendolyn sighed. She too had known what it was



for bright dreams to melt away, leaving behind a colourless expanse, such as her eye now rested upon in the outside world that day.

"But, Cynthia, you always said that as a 'brilliant young countess' you would be happy in your own way."

"Ah, yes; we say a good many things like that when we know no better. My youth and brilliance seem to have gone; and Tremain is not fit for any kind of gaiety. I did not foresee that he would break up like this."

"He may get stronger. He does not seem so very weak to me," said Gwendolyn. "He ought to rouse himself and take you about."

Cynthia shook her head.

"He could not do it. He is only well because we keep so perfectly quiet. I thought as you did a fortnight back, and fancied a little change and bustle would do him good. We owed hospitality in various quarters, for we had dined with all the county families round before Tremain's illness, and we had not been able to ask any one back; so I sent out invitations, and we gave a large dinner-party. If you could have seen Tremain then, you would not wonder that I have no wish to repeat the experiment. Poor fellow, he seemed to grow perfectly bewildered, and not to know what he said. His old courtliness of manner still clung to him, but it seemed to make his helplessness the more pitiable. He looked to me to prompt him every time a question was asked him. Everything was, 'My wife

will tell you all that,' or, 'My wife sees to things for me now.' People were very kind. They all like him round here, and they helped me and helped him to carry things off; but I could see how shocked they were at the change. And when I saw the last of them go, you can guess how fervently I said, 'Never again!'"

"But, Cynthia," expostulated Gwendolyn quickly, "you don't mean that you are never going into society any more?"

"I don't see any immediate prospect of doing so. The doctors tell me plainly that they consider Tremain likely to grow worse rather than better."

"But couldn't you go without him?"

"Hardly. For one thing, I don't consider it good form for married women to go about without their husbands; and then Tremain would not like it. He would not understand, and it would distress him. He cannot bear to have me out of his sight above an hour or two."

"But that is not right—it cannot be right!" cried Gwendolyn. "You should think of yourself as well as of him. It is not fair that he should have everything and you nothing. I think you consider him too much."

Cynthia shook her head.

"I took him for better, for worse, you know, Gwendolyn. I do not see that I should go back upon my word just because it happens to be the worse."

"But how will you ever bear such a life?"

"Oh, very well, when once I have grown used to it. I shall vegetate placidly."

"I believe it is killing you."

"Oh dear no."

"You will never be able to stand it."

"We shall see. After all, Gwendolyn, I don't see that I should gain much by a change. Suppose I did come to Palace Gardens and queen it there, what would it all come to? Dinners and dances or the opera every night. I should be tired to death by the monotony in a few weeks. I should drive round the ring in an exquisitely-appointed equipage; my dresses and jewels would be talked about. I should be admired and courted for a while; then grow stale, and be forgotten. I should patronize my former friends, and be patronized by the old aristocracy of my husband's standing; and I should be talked about for a season or two for the brilliance of my entertainments. But, after all, what does it all come to? 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' I should be sick to death of it all long before a season was over, and should be longing for the quiet and seclusion of Tremain. One always wants what one has not got; but after all comes the question,—What is the good of it all?"

"Yes, indeed," echoed Gwendolyn with a deep sigh; "what is the good of it all?"

"You are a little young to have learned the question already," said Cynthia. "Young, that is, in the amount of life you have seen; but there it always is, looming before us in the distance—What is the good of it all?"

There was no response to this. Both women sat very quiet, gazing into the fire and thinking.

"Once," said Gwendolyn slowly, "I thought I could never feel like this. I thought, whatever happened, I could be glad at heart. I cannot even now remember or understand what it was that made me feel so. It has all gone now."

"I was afraid it would," answered Cynthia slowly and sadly. "I knew what that sort of fervour and enthusiasm was worth; I have had attacks of it myself. But it does not last—how can it? It is only like a house built upon the sand."

"I thought mine was built upon a rock," answered Gwendolyn.

"We all think that at the time; but it is only sand after all—the sand of our own emotions and feelings. The tide of facts and realities soon washes the structure away."

"Some people seem to build upon a firmer foundation than that."

"They do; I must admit so much. But is it anything more than 'seems'?"

"That is just what I want so much to know. I think Mr. Carlingford could have helped me; but he was ill just when I most wanted somebody, and now I don't know where to turn."

"You still believe in turning to some one? You still have that much faith left?"

Gwendolyn's face grew more and more thoughtful. It was some while before she answered.

"Yes; I just have faith enough left for that. I do believe there is help somewhere even for us, and rest

too, and perhaps even happiness. Cynthia, haven't you feelings like this, too, sometimes?"

"Feelings! yes," answered Cynthia with a smile, half-sad, half-bitter. "I have many feelings which cannot be called convictions, unfortunately, and which give rise to a host of longings, doomed, I fear, never to be realized. Yes, my Golden Gwendolyn, I know all about your feelings."

"And, Cynthia," said Gwendolyn with some hesitation, "have you any faith left?"

Cynthia's answer was long in coming, and then it was wearily spoken.

"I do not know, Gwendolyn. I feel as if I had lost all sense of the meaning of words. If faith means a disability to doubt God's existence, then I have it; for I cannot disbelieve that, although I have many times almost wished I could. But if it means a personal confidence in any Fatherly love he may have towards me, then, certainly, I have it not; for to me all is very dark and very dreary."

"And to me—now," said Gwendolyn. "I seem to have lost everything that made life sweet. It is very hard to believe that God cares for us when everything goes wrong; but some people can."

"Yes, they can. The question is, Are they deluded, or are we blind?"

"I cannot tell."

"Nor I. I sometimes feel put to shame when Tremain, in his simple fashion, kneels down morning and night to thank God for giving him such a wife. Such

a wife!" and Cynthia's smile was bitter, whilst not untender. "In his feeble state, he speaks aloud as often as not; and I can hear the earnest formula of thanksgiving pass his lips over and over again. He, at least, believes that God has cared for him, and brought him a blessing in his old age."

"So he has!" answered Gwendolyn impulsively.

"Well," returned Cynthia, without the irreverence in her tone which the words seemed to imply, "if I am one of God's choicest blessings, I cannot say much for their intrinsic worth."

There was a silence between them which was broken by the hound, who, seeming to read trouble in his mistress's face, pushed his nose closer against her hand, and gave a low whine of sympathy.

"Ah, Bruce!" said Cynthia, looking down into the soft, loving, brown eyes, "if we could all take example by you, what a much simpler thing life would be!"

"How?" asked Gwendolyn. "How fond he is of you, Cynthia."

"Yes, that is just what I say. He is fond of me, and that makes the happiness of his life. Just to be with me and near me, day and night, is all the happiness he wants. It is his life, I verily believe, this fond, unreasoning love. I can quite believe he would pine and die without it. If there was any love like that in our natures, if we had some object to love and to live for, and to find happiness in, life would be a far simpler thing."

Sudden tears sprang to Gwendolyn's eyes.

"I did love like that once," she said with lowered eyelids, "but—"

"But your idol was shattered. Ah! yes; that is always our fate, we poor human creatures, that mingle reason with love."

"Your idol was not shattered like mine," objected Gwendolyn; "you could go on loving him."

"Hopeless love is not such a happy thing as you seem to think," answered Cynthia quietly and steadily; "but every one thinks his own trouble the worst to bear. Now I cannot love without sin, and my heart is too dead ever to be in danger from that love again. But for all you may say or think in your inexperience, I say, and I hold to it, that no human creature's love can bring the utter contentment and satiety which the brute creation can enjoy, because we cannot yield up our reason altogether to love; and never yet was man so perfect as to be without stain, even in the eyes which were ready to look with loving worship on his every act. You have loved, Gwendolyn: even in your deepest happiness and passion did not you experience *one* little misgiving, see one dim floating cloud?"

Gwendolyn's answer was not very distinct.

"I hardly know—I don't think I was conscious of it at the time."

"Your training was not like mine; you had not learned to analyze and be ever on your guard. I loved deeply and truly, and never man was more noble, more worthy of love, than was Reginald Kennedy; yet I had my moments of dread, of misgiving. There were mo-

ments when I asked myself, with a thrill of dread, 'Are we suited to each other? Can we make each other happy?' Gwendolyn, I am convinced of this, that until we have a perfect object for our love, love can never make us absolutely and entirely happy. In other words, happiness is not for us at all."

"Would such a love make us happy, if we could ever reach to it?" asked Gwendolyn with a sigh.

"I think so. One knows what a power of happiness love is. Look at Tremain: he is almost perfectly happy in his love for me, because his reasoning powers are too weak to detect the flaws in his heart's idol. Look at that dog: he is absolutely happy to be allowed to lie at my feet and receive an occasional caress. It is nothing in me that satisfies them; it is the strength of their own unreasoning love."

"I wish I could love like that."

"I have sometimes wished it; but I think, on the whole, I would rather be denied the happiness than love without reason."

"But is there no one we can love reasonably and entirely?" asked Gwendolyn with hesitation.

"No one."

With still more hesitation Gwendolyn put the next timid question,—

"Not God, Cynthia?"

Cynthia leaned back in her chair and half closed her eyes.

"When people talk about loving God in that way, it simply conveys no impression at all to my mind."



Gwendolyn's own heart was forced to admit that at this moment she, too, failed utterly at grasping such an idea.

"I believe," she said slowly, forced to defend the position she had taken up, "that some people love like that."

"Do they?"

"Yes, I think so; and it makes them happy."

"Very probably."

"But," and here Gwendolyn spoke with very much more decision and fervour, "I don't believe I should ever be able to feel like that for any length of time."

"Just so; and a brief experience is worse than none at all."

"Yes, I am afraid it is."

"Then the best thing we can do, Gwendolyn, you and I, is not to trouble ourselves about matters too high for us. We shall only get into worse shoals and quick-sands, or lose our feet altogether in deep waters."

But Gwendolyn could not quite echo this sentiment. She had a latent wish to learn more of the mysteries of love and sorrow which seemed to hang like a cloud about her life. She felt that there was light beyond, if she could only reach it.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### GWENDOLYN REFLECTS.

CYNTHIA had not maligned their climate when she had said that a sea-fog would sometimes hang over them for days. Gwendolyn was destined to see the verification of these words, and for three days nobody at Tremain stirred beyond its walls for pleasure or for exercise.

Lord Tremain took it into his head to go over a vast accumulation of letters and papers, which he had allowed to fill and choke all available space in his large library. Of course, he wanted his wife's assistance in this task, and so it came about that Gwendolyn found herself much alone during these dismal days.

But if dismal and if lonely, these days were not wasted, for they were spent for the most part in earnest thought—such thought as the busy life of the past months had rendered all but impossible.

Gwendolyn, disappointed with the world, desolate in her love, sick at heart with unsatisfied longings after what would bring peace and comfort could she but find it, was a very different being from the untried girl of

six months ago; and she was more and more conscious of the change in herself.

She recalled those past days, and lived them over again in memory, trying to assume once again the habit of mind and thought which belonged to her then.

She had been wayward and high-spirited, from the fact that no one had ever controlled her. She remembered how, in the first bitterness of her grief, she had rebelled against God in fierce words and angry thoughts. She had felt strong enough to stand alone, and had not asked his help in the burden of her sorrow.

Yes, she had certainly changed since then. In her new life, and amid its many impalpable restraints, she had quite lost the old sense of independent, careless strength. Her aunt's influence, Cynthia's example, and the whole tone of the new life had quite changed the current of her ideas; and although she had not yielded up her freedom of thought or of speech, she was far more guarded in her words than once she had been, and had no great wish to act on her sole responsibility; although, as has been seen, she could do so upon occasion, and with much firmness of purpose.

But there had been other changes than these, and it was in reference to these other changes that Gwendolyn's thoughts were so busily employed.

The past six months had been fraught for her with much trouble, much change. Trouble is a powerful element in the soul's history—a purifier, a refiner, with a complex, curious task to perform; and a task which, under favourable circumstances, seldom fails to be accom-

plished. Seldom does it fail to purge away the dross and reveal the pure gold which lies beneath; only when there is no hidden gold does its mission seem useless, its work one of simple destruction.

Gwendolyn's soul had been tried in the furnace of affliction; and now that the fiercest of the scorching heat had passed, she was beginning to suspect that beneath the dead ashes of an unworthy, an earthly love, lay some hidden possibilities of golden happiness, which, in her first anguish and trouble, she had believed to be utterly and hopelessly destroyed.

She compared this state of desolation with that which had followed upon her father's death, and found that she had made distinct progress.

She could not deny to herself, though half ashamed to admit it, that her father's death had not been so heavy a blow as the loss of her lover—that the latter grief had been far more crushing than the former. And yet, now that the first shock had passed, she felt more sure of the ground beneath her feet than she had done six months ago.

She recalled the hopeless blank her mind had been in that snowy January which looked so far away now.

"Why, I hardly knew if there was a God then," she said to herself; "and now, now I do know—yes, I *know* that he lives, and that he does care for us, whatever people may say."

Her Bible then had been to her as a strange, unknown land, about which she could hardly find her way. Now it was, at least in many places, a sweet and

familiar country, in which she could wander at will in silent enjoyment, finding in it new beauty and refreshment at each new journey.

Even in her darkest hours the Bible words had had just a little soothing power. Even when all the light and hope had been blotted out by despairing doubts, she had not lost all sense of light beyond, even though she might never be able to reach it.

All this was very different from her mental state at the time of her father's death. She could not yet say that peace or happiness had been attained, but at least the blackness was not so dense.

"It was so much darker then," mused Gwendolyn. "I did not really care much to learn that first time. After a little while I was much more interested in the parties Cynthia went to, in riding in the Row, and seeing new people, than in anything else. I wanted to be happy, and I wanted to be good, in a vague sort of way; and Mr. Carlingford made me really in earnest for a time. But I soon forgot to think seriously; and when Kenrick came I believe I never really cared for anything else. Oh yes, I can see now. I was not in earnest really—not as I am now, when everything looks dark round me, and friends have changed and grown cold because I am poor instead of rich. If anybody would talk to me now, and put me in the way of understanding things, how differently I should listen!

"Cynthia is unhappy too, poor dear Cynthia! She knows more than I, and yet she is so unhappy and distrustful. Perhaps it is because she has lived so long in

the world. I have found six months quite enough. Cynthia has been very good to me, like a sister and a friend in one; and I know she will always be a true friend, whatever may happen to me or to my fortune. How I wish I could help and comfort her. If I could only find the light myself, I might be able to lead her to it. Whom can I find to help me? I wonder if Aunt Magdalene will?"

These days of solitary reflection and meditation, if they did not lead to any immediate result, were not wasted; honest self-examination never is. And although Gwendolyn could not at once find her way out from the cloud and shadow which encircled her, she knew how she stood, and felt sure of the ground beneath her.

She had need of all the cheerfulness she could muster, for Cynthia, out of her husband's presence, flagged sadly, and seemed to need all Gwendolyn's affectionate sympathy. It appeared to the girl more illness of mind than of body, but therefore the more difficult to combat.

When at last the sun did shine out again upon the damp world, it was with a positive feeling of relief that Gwendolyn saw Lord Tremain ride out, attended by his groom, for a tour of inspection round his estate.

"It is lovely out of doors," she said. "I shall take you into the fir wood, Cynthia, and make you lie down there. The air will do you good, and nobody will come to disturb us; and it is quite dry with all the sunshine this morning. Just send a man out with some rugs, and we will settle ourselves there, and have our tea out

there too. Lord Tremain ought not to worry and tire you as he does over those horrid old papers."

"That doesn't tire me particularly. I should be just the same if I did nothing."

"He ought to have more consideration."

"Poor old fellow! it is not his fault. You must not abuse him, Gwendolyn."

"He makes me cross sometimes. I suppose I do not realize that he is ill in a way himself. People talk about being an old man's darling, or a young man's slave, but—"

"But I combine the two offices in one—slave and darling both, you would say. Well, that is quite fair, is it not? Come, Gwendolyn, there are our rugs going out. I think I must leave word that if Aunt Knollys should call we must be summoned. She is sure to come soon to see you, and would be disappointed to miss you like this. We will be at home to her, and out to all the rest of the world. Will that do?"

The little fir wood made a very pleasant place of retreat upon a hot August afternoon. Cynthia smiled with a sort of restful satisfaction as she settled herself upon her pile of rugs. The sunshine was warm and bright, slanting in between the tall ruddy trunks of the trees; it gave a picturesque brightness and colour to all around without distressing them by the power of its rays.

"Tremain is a pretty place when the sun shines," said Gwendolyn, drawing a long breath. "I do like to have a glimpse of the sea, as we have from here, just

shining in the distance. Oh yes, Cynthia, I could be very fond of Tremain."

"I hope you will be, my dear child, for I want to keep you here as long as I can."

"For your sake or for mine?" asked Gwendolyn with a half-sad smile.

"For mine. I always think first for myself, as you doubtless know by this time. If it should suit you too, so much the better; but it is for myself I wish it, in the selfish hope of keeping you so that I can enjoy your society as long as possible. Do you know, Gwendolyn, amongst all my hundreds of acquaintances and friends, I have not one whom I could ask to stay with me now in our present solitude, save yourself."

"I am very pleased you like to have me," said Gwendolyn simply and sincerely; "for I always did like to be with you from the first."

"I believe you did. We took to each other. It has been a great blessing to me, I know. I am naturally sociable. I feel sure of it. Constant repression is a burden to me."

"I should think it must be to every one."

"I don't know. Cicely, for instance, never seems to want a confidante of any kind. I do. I always preferred to confide in some one if I could. I have made one or two attempts before to make a confidential friend; but they have all failed me signally, except you."

After a little thought Gwendolyn said,—

"I hope I shall not fail you too. Cynthia, I fancied



the other day that Aunt Magdalene would be a person one could confide in when one knew her better."

Cynthia smiled languidly.

"You might be able to, perhaps, dear."

"Could not you?"

"Oh dear no. Aunt Knollys is a very estimable woman, but not at all my style."

"What is your style?"

"You may well ask. I can hardly tell myself, but I have my doubts whether Aunt Knollys and I ever will be intimate."

"I liked her," said Gwendolyn.

"I am glad of that. I hope you will go on liking her better still. It may be an inducement to keep you longer at Tremain."

"You seem to think I need a great deal of pressure, Cynthia."

"I know it is very dull here."

"I know I feel ever so much better for my first ten days."

"You are a good child to say so, any way. I hope in a few weeks' time we shall be a little less dismal. If Tremain goes on gaining power as he is now doing, I hope to have a few, just a very few people here for the shooting when September comes. Tremain is very well preserved, and my husband has never failed to have a shooting party for years and years. General Alexander, his great friend, always comes; and I think an old friend like that would do him good. I should like to have Bernard down (you wouldn't mind, would you?) and

Bertie Heron ; and I would ask Cicely and mamma for a week or so. I should like to see Cicely again ; and of course mamma would expect to be asked too. I think we could manage to entertain a little family party like that, couldn't we ? And if we didn't have them all down together, I don't think it would hurt Tremain. He has seemed to be a little better since you have been here ; and it did not at all bewilder him."

Before Gwendolyn could frame an answer a servant was seen approaching, and behind him followed Mrs. Knollys.

"I said I would come out to you, when I heard you were not far away," she said, kissing both her nieces with quiet affection. "I have been trying to come every day, but the weather quite prevented it. What a nice nest you have made for yourselves here !"

Mrs. Knollys sat down, looking at her young relatives with a kindly interest expressed in her clear blue eyes.

Gwendolyn smiled back, and seated herself near to her aunt upon the brown elastic turf.

"We thought you might perhaps come—Cynthia did ; so we left word that they were to tell us."

"I am much obliged to Cynthia.—Your husband is going on well, I hope ?"

"I think so, thank you. He is out riding to-day. He seems to be going on well."

Cynthia spoke indifferently. Imperceptibly yet distinctly her manner had changed. She was once again the fine, languid lady of a London drawing-room.

"Tremain is a beautiful place. Don't you think so,

Gwendolyn?" asked Mrs. Knollys, her glance resting lovingly upon the fair face of the younger girl.

"Yes, beautiful," she answered warmly. "I was just telling Cynthia so."

"We have just been agreeing that it is insupportably dull," remarked Cynthia with a smile. "We are planning to mend matters in that respect, Aunt Knollys. What should you say to a shooting party next month? Tremain has always been renowned for its shooting, has it not?"

"Yes, I believe so. I should think a shooting party would make a pleasant variety, if Lord Tremain is well enough. I am glad you are able to be planning such a thing."

"Oh, we cannot lead this hermit existence for ever," said Cynthia. "I think I am a model wife to have endured it so long. Three months' *tête-à-tête* is as much as any husband can expect. Don't you think so, Aunt Knollys? Do you really think it would be fair to expect me to vegetate here for ever,—this is not life, it is simply a vegetable existence,—simply because Tremain is not quite so strong as once he was?"

Gwendolyn looked disturbed, but as usual she remained silent under the spell of Cynthia's sarcasm. She knew herself powerless as an antagonist. If Cynthia chose to paint herself black, no power on earth could restrain her.

"Well, Cynthia," answered Mrs. Knollys kindly, "I had a very similar experience in my young married days. I can feel for you and with you better than

you perhaps know. Still, we can never judge for one another ; and I should be able, I think, to trust you to do what was right towards your husband in the first place, and yourself in the second."

"Ah, yes ; you are old-fashioned, are you not, Aunt Knollys ? and you put the husband first. I know you did it yourself, for you gave up everything and went and lived abroad with him. I know all about it, you see. But we don't do that sort of thing now, you know."

"What do you do then instead ?" and Mrs. Knollys' eyes looked ready to smile in spite of the gravity of her face and voice.

"Oh, we each take care of our own concerns. The husband goes his way and follows his pursuits, and the wife goes hers and amuses herself in her favourite fashion. It answers very well, and saves a world of trouble, to say nothing of mutual recrimination."

"I see. So your way of amusing yourself has been to shut yourself up with your husband in his country-house and nurse him through an illness. Well, do you know, I do not see that the new fashion and the old are so very different after all."

Cynthia's colour rose very slightly, as though she was not quite pleased. All she said, however, was spoken in the same languidly sarcastic way as before.

"We newly-married women have no choice in the matter—for the first few months, at any rate, before our husbands have had time to tire of us. I have always been very particular about appearances, Aunt Knollys.

I have done credit to my training in this respect. I knew better than to attempt to emancipate myself too soon; and I shall appear with all the greater *éclat* in London from having withdrawn the light of my countenance for the best part of a season."

Mrs. Knollys listened attentively to Cynthia's talk, and watched her face closely, rather more closely than Lady Tremain seemed to care about. She rose slowly from her luxurious couch.

"It is not a very edifying subject, is it?" she continued, with a faint ironical smile. "But you brought it upon yourself, you know. When we are better acquainted, Aunt Knollys, you will not try to draw me out upon my duty to my neighbour. It is a topic upon which I am profoundly ignorant and indifferent. I content myself with studying exhaustively my duty towards myself.—Gwendolyn, I find it a little too hot out here. I shall go indoors again. When you have enjoyed Aunt Knollys' society a little longer, will you bring her in to have some tea? I am sure you two have a great deal you are longing to say to each other."

Cynthia moved slowly away, and Mrs. Knollys, looking after her, said,—

"She is very unhappy, Gwendolyn."

"I am afraid so."

"And she will shrink from the least attempt at sympathy or inquiry from me."

"I am afraid so."

"Do you know the cause?"

"I think I know as much as any one but herself can know, but it does not come to very much. She is unhappy for everything, it seems; and she has nothing to help her, no hope or trust in anything."

Mrs. Knollys' face was grave and tender.

"Poor child!" she said; "so young and so helpless. We must help her if we can, Gwendolyn."

"I am afraid I do not know how. Cynthia can always argue away my points. I know so little; and she has known a great deal and found it all a failure."

Mrs. Knollys smiled as if more to herself than at anything Gwendolyn had said.

"I was thinking—perhaps—if you would teach me, Aunt Magdalene, then I might be able to teach Cynthia."

"My dear," said her aunt quietly, "I think we shall both find that it is beyond your power or mine to 'teach Cynthia,' as you call it."

"Then will she never know—never be happy?" asked Gwendolyn blankly.

"God forbid! It must be our prayer for her that he himself will be her guide and counsellor."

Later in the day, when the three were together again, Mrs. Knollys had a good many inquiries to make about Gwendolyn's private affairs. They were somewhat more settled now than at first; and she believed she would have about four hundred a year, in addition to what might be added if Wylmington let. She had heard from the agent that a Mr. Salisbury, a friend of Bertie

Heron, had been inquiring about it, and he believed the matter would end by his taking it.

Gwendolyn felt that she almost ought to visit the place before allowing it to pass into the keeping of strangers, and Cynthia and her aunt cordially agreed in this view of the case.

To her great delight, Mrs. Knollys offered to be her companion to her childhood's home, and this offer was gratefully accepted.

During the few days that aunt and niece spent together in Gwendolyn's old home the two drew very closely together, and the girl learned by slow and imperceptible degrees many lessons of love and trust which sank very deeply into her heart.

Mrs. Knollys was finishing the work Mr. Maltby's last letter had begun.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ANOTHER VISITOR.

WHEN Gwendolyn returned to Tremain at the end of the week, she found General Alexander already established there ; and his presence seemed to do good to his host, and certainly relieved Cynthia of a part of her cares. She looked somewhat better and brighter, and told Gwendolyn, with some approach to animation, that Cicely was coming early the following week.

"Mamma cannot come yet. It is too near the first, and they have people coming to Condovery ; but she has spared Cicely, who is never very good at entertaining people, and has invited some of our Allardice cousins, with whom she is an object of reverential admiration, to come and assist her to do the honours. I shall be glad to have Cicely by herself."

"Yes," assented Gwendolyn. "I think it will be nice to be together, just the three of us. I am fond of Cicely, though I never could make a friend of her as I did of you."

"I believe I am fonder of her than I knew. Any way I am glad she is coming."



"And Bernard?" asked Gwendolyn.

Cynthia smiled significantly.

"Bernard is ready enough to come,—the shooting here is much better than at Condoover,—but the maternal mind is much perturbed upon the subject. Can you guess the reason why?"

Gwendolyn lifted her head with a gesture of scornful pride and disdain.

"Really, Aunt Allardice need not give herself any anxiety. Bernard has quite got over his foolish fancy; and I—"

"Just so, Gwendolyn; but one of the things you can never make mamma believe is that a woman is not continually and systematically scheming for advancement, and will never fail to better herself by a good marriage. As things stand now, Bernard would be a fairly good match for you. Mamma will never cease to fear your charms and powers of fascination, until one of you is safely married."

Gwendolyn's lip curled.

"She may make her mind easy. Bernard will never be my fate. A few months back she was almost ready to implore me to have him—such a wife as myself would be the making of him!"

"Ah! you had money then, Gwendolyn. That makes a vast difference in one's character, as you will find out for yourself in due course."

"I know. Once I believed it was only really bad people who thought that sort of thing."

Cynthia smiled rather sadly.

"Once you were very innocent and simple-minded, as we all are at some time in our lives. But if we learn evil in the world, we learn charity and discrimination too. We find we can understand and make excuses for what we once should unhesitatingly condemn. Is it not so, Gwendolyn?"

"Perhaps—yes—I suppose it is to a certain extent. We certainly cannot live up to our ideals. But to return, is Bernard coming?"

"A compromise has been agreed upon. He will come down for a while, but as Aunt Knollys' guest."

"Aunt Knollys! Does he know her?"

"Yes. He is the only one of us who ever visited her. Bernard, of course, has been allowed to knock about much as he pleased for the last year or two, and he has elected from time to time to visit Aunt Knollys. He and she are in fact capital friends."

"Ah!"

"Yes; and he will be there for a while; and Bertie Heron will be here, so I expect we shall see almost as much of Bernard as if he were staying in the house."

"Bertie is coming then?"

"Yes; and he knows the Salisburys very well—the people who have taken Wylmington. Most likely he will go there himself for a part of the shooting season."

Cynthia had certainly recovered some of her old spirits. She was more animated during the next few days than she had ever shown herself since Gwendolyn's arrival at Tremain, and the change was a welcome one to all who saw it.

Gwendolyn met Cicely when she arrived the week following. Cicely looked better than she had done at the close of the London season, but was just as grave and quiet as ever. She greeted Gwendolyn, however, with some warmth, and asked almost anxiously, as it seemed, after her sister.

As they were driving together towards the castle, she asked in a quick, abrupt fashion,—

“Gwendolyn, do you think Cynthia is happy?”

“I don’t know.”

“Does she repent her marriage?”

“I do not know. She is a very good wife. She has never said a word which could suggest such a thing.”

“I thought hardly of her about it,” continued Cicely with great gravity. “I thought it was a mere marriage for wealth and position, and I half-despised her for making it, just as I half-despised her for letting mamma break off her engagement with Reginald Kennedy. I am sorry now. I should not have judged her.”

Gwendolyn looked at Cicely, and answered slowly,—

“No; we can never understand other people well enough to judge them. I have found that out now. And Cynthia always makes the worst of herself.”

“Yes; and she has always been so much under mamma’s influence. Mamma was proud of her, and brought her out young, and saw so much of her always. She never had a fair chance of independence. I did not know it before; nor did I know mamma’s power. She shielded me without my knowing it.”

"What do you mean, Cicely?"

"I mean that so long as Cynthia was unmarried, mamma gave the great part of her time and attention to her, and I was left to my own devices to a great extent, as there was still plenty of time before me."

"Well?"

"Well? Oh well, now, you see, it has all changed. Cynthia no longer engrosses her thoughts. Cynthia has made a really brilliant marriage. She has washed her hands of you and your affairs; but she must have something to occupy her mind and energies."

Gwendolyn could not but smile.

"Are you the victim now, Cicely?"

"No; I do not allow myself to become so. Having had so much time to myself I have learned independence. Cynthia never had that chance."

Gwendolyn's curiosity was piqued.

"Tell me some more, Cicely."

"There is so little to tell. You know what mamma is. Nothing seems tangible, though real enough."

"Who is it?"

Cicely could not but smile.

"The 'who,' if you must know, is a youthful, fox-hunting, dissipated squire who owns the adjoining property to Condoover, having lately succeeded an old uncle who died six months ago. He is just a cub, with nothing but wealth to recommend him. I believe he drinks, and I know his character is bad, so there is little fear of my falling a victim to his charms."

"Does Aunt Allardice know?"

"There is no reason why she should not know. Of course, there is nothing about him openly disreputable. He goes everywhere, and has always been used to good society. But for all that he is a dissipated ne'er-do-well, without a spark of intellect or spirituality—just the kind of man people say will be entirely reformed and remodelled by marriage. I leave you to guess what is generally the result of the experiment."

"I should think you were glad to leave Condoover."

"I was not sorry."

"Did Aunt Allardice mind?"

"I believe at first she was prepared to object; but I had come to the conclusion that it was time to speak out and give her a piece of my mind. Mamma is very strong and very clever—much more so than ever I knew before—and she is clever enough to know just how far she can go, and not to go beyond. When I spoke out she saw it would be useless to attempt more, and she yielded with the sweetest grace in the world."

Gwendolyn could not help smiling at the idea of her aunt's discomfiture. She looked at Cicely's grave face with something of admiration.

"I wish I had heard you."

"Perhaps you would have enjoyed it more than I did. If there is one thing in the world that I hate more than another, it is having to talk seriously with mamma. It is very hard not to let her get the best of the argument after all."

"She did not in this case?"

"Well, I gained my point, and I made her under-

stand me; but what with sad regrets at my want of Christian charity, my tendency towards harsh judgment of others, my over-confidence in my own opinions, and all the rest of it, she managed to take the wind out of my sails pretty well."

"Cicely," said Gwendolyn with sympathy, "I know what you mean; but—don't you think perhaps it would be better not to say such things?"

"Yes, much better. I wish that I could help thinking them. Well, that is how the matter stands. I am in something of exile and disgrace just now—though not nominally so; and I am very glad to come to Cynthia here, and I certainly feel to understand her position at home and her difficulties better than I ever did before."

"Yes, I suppose you do."

"I wish I had better understood then; I might have been able to help her, perhaps. I should certainly have given her more sympathy."

After a pause Cicely added, without great apparent relevance,—

"Do you know that Reginald Kennedy is coming back in the autumn as Mr. Carlingford's curate?"

"Is he?"

"Yes; the East End is too much for him. He has quite knocked himself up with his years of hard work, and his trouble of mind as well. I hope he may have got over that, partially at least, by this time. Any way he is coming. He was a good deal with Mr. Carlingford during his illness, as he had resigned his curacy at

St. Stephen's. People will be very glad to have him back; he was a great favourite with us."

"What does Aunt Allardice say?"

"Oh, she is very gracious. He called once before we left, and she made him very welcome. Now that Cynthia is safely married she can afford to be friendly. I dare say she will make much of him again, just to show people that she had no hand in breaking the engagement. It does not suit her to be thought mercenary-minded."

"Shall you be glad to have him back?" Gwendolyn asked with pardonable curiosity.

"Yes, very. I was always fond of Reginald, always so glad that Cynthia would marry him, and that he would belong to us in a sort of way. He helped me a great deal one way and another. I used often to think that if things had gone differently, Cynthia and I would both be better women than we are."

Gwendolyn was silent. She knew that Cynthia had said just the same.

"Shall you tell Cynthia about it?" she asked presently.

"I don't know. She is sure to hear it sooner or later; but I never speak to her about Reginald. I don't know how she feels about him. It makes it worse now she is married if—"

"I do not think you need be afraid," said Gwendolyn; "I am sure she has put that love quite out of her heart. I believe she is really fond of Lord Tremain now. She is very good to him."

"I think I shall say nothing," answered Cicely, "un-

less the subject comes up. I would rather not talk to her about Reginald at all.—And is this Tremain? Oh, there is the sea! What a beautiful old place!”

Cynthia received her sister with an affectionate warmth which it pleased Gwendolyn to witness. It had always been a puzzle to her why they had seemed to care so little for each other's society, when she had found both so interesting.

Lord Tremain too was at his best—courtly and genial, and pleased to welcome his wife's sister under his roof—and the evening passed very quickly and happily. Cynthia was full of interest about the people and places she had not seen for what seemed to her a long while, and the two sisters sat side by side upon a sofa talking with an animation unusual to both.

Gwendolyn listened awhile to the talk, and then strayed out through the open window on to the terrace which overlooked the sea.

It was a moonlight night, and the tide was coming in. The scene had a peaceful magnificence infinitely lovely and restful. Gwendolyn stood for a long while wrapped in thought, gazing out over the silvery waves.

The heavy load which had lain upon her spirit for a time which seemed an eternity to her, had gradually grown lighter and more light; and in the same imperceptible way the darkness which had shrouded her soul seemed to have grown lighter.

The moonlight and the sea suggested a new train of thought to Gwendolyn's mind, and with a half smile she said to herself,—



“‘It was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind; and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship.’

“Has it been something like that with me? Have I not been tossed about by storms in the darkness when Jesus had not come? Will he say to me by-and-by, ‘It is I’? Is he saying it now?”

The train of thought suggested by this simile continued some while. Gwendolyn was only roused by the sound of a footfall on the beach beneath—an uncertain stumbling tread, as though the pedestrian found walking difficult if not dangerous, as well indeed he might under the circumstances.

Surprised at so unusual an occurrence as a stranger walking upon the shore, Gwendolyn moved to the edge of the terrace and looked over. In the moonlight she could see a tall man’s dark figure down amid the boulders, at no great distance beneath; and he must have seen her, for a hat was lifted, and an unmistakably gentle voice asked,—

“Could you tell me, if you please, whether it is possible to get round to the main road by the coast? I am a stranger, and have been wandering about rather more than is perhaps quite prudent with a rising tide. If I am trespassing, I must ask your pardon, for I have no idea where I have got to.”

“To rather an awkward place, I fear,” returned Gwendolyn, smiling in the darkness at his predicament. “You cannot go on, for very soon the cliffs run far out

to sea ; and you cannot go back the way you came, because the tide has cut you off by now."

The stranger laughed at this intelligence.

"I have got myself into a nicer plight than I even thought. What must I do, if I may venture to appeal once more to your generosity ? Wait where I am till the tide turns, or swallows me up ?"

"Well, if you can see no better way out of the difficulty, perhaps you had better," answered Gwendolyn, with an air of gentle consideration.

"Gwendolyn, my dear, to whom are you talking ?"

It was Lord Tremain's urbane accents that interrupted the colloquy, and Gwendolyn turned to him and laughingly indicated the unfortunate traveller beneath.

"There is a gentleman down there who has wandered along by the coast until he has got caught by the tide. He was just asking me how to get out of the difficulty."

The dark figure below again lifted its hat.

"I am very sorry, sir, for intruding upon your privacy in this uncereemonious fashion ; but I assure you it is your lovely coast and climate more than any natural audacity on my part that is to blame."

"My dear sir," answered Lord Tremain, "I am only too glad you have come to no greater harm along our treacherous coast. Can you see the steps cut in the rock just below where I stand ? If you will mount them, you will find yourself upon the terrace and in safety."

Three minutes later the stranger stood beside them, thanking them with courteous, pleasant words for the service rendered him. He was so unmistakably the

gentleman, that Lord Tremain, after a few minutes' conversation, asked him to step into the drawing-room and take a cup of tea.

"I must tell my wife your story—how nearly a sad tragedy was played out beneath our walls.—Gwendolyn, will you lead the way?"

She obeyed, and the party of three entered the drawing-room, to encounter glances of surprise from its occupants. Cynthia looked up; and then it seemed as if she turned very white as she rose to receive the guest her husband brought with him.

Was this so, or were her eyes dazzled by coming into the light? Gwendolyn wondered. The next moment she wondered no longer, for Cicely had said, in a low quick whisper,—

"What have you done? It is Reginald Kennedy."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### LOVER AND HUSBAND.

CYNTHIA was very pale, but she rose quite calmly to receive the stranger her husband smilingly presented to her with some words of introduction she evidently did not hear or heed. She held out her hand with a faint, cold smile, and said,—

“How are you, Mr. Kennedy?”

“What!” cried Lord Tremain, looking more beaming than ever, “so you are old friends, are you?”

“Yes,” answered Cynthia quietly; and, lifting her eyes to her husband’s face with a glance at once significant and imploring, she added, “It is Mr. Kennedy, Tremain—Reginald Kennedy.”

Kennedy was shaking hands with Cicely at this moment, and therefore did not catch the import of word or tone. He, too, was self-possessed and calm.

Gwendolyn was looking at Lord Tremain, wondering what effect would be produced upon him by this revelation. But it was immediately evident that the name of Reginald Kennedy awakened no emotion in his mind.

His impaired memory failed to recall it, and his face only grew more genial and pleasant.

"Ah, indeed! What a fortunate accident that he should have found his way here!—Mr. Kennedy, you must stand in need of rest and refreshment after your long rough walk. How far did you walk in that perilous fashion along the coast? Did you know what a rash enterprise you had undertaken?"

"No, not quite. It dawned upon me, after a while, that it might become unsafe with a rapidly-rising tide. But I had gone so far that I was tempted to presume upon my success. It is a glorious night!"

"Ah, yes, so it is. We do get beautiful moonlight nights down here. I am so glad you found your way here, Mr. Kennedy. I am always so delighted to meet any of my wife's friends. She has been shut up here three months and more, owing to an illness of mine; but I know her value too well to wish to monopolize her entirely. That would be too selfish. She will give you an excellent cup of tea, whilst you renew your old acquaintance. I see my friend is waiting to be check-mated over there. I cannot deprive him of that pleasure."

Lord Tremain moved smilingly away to the chess-table, where General Alexander was waiting for him. Kennedy, as there seemed no alternative, approached Cynthia and took a seat beside the tea-table.

Lord Tremain always liked his wife to pour him out his evening cup of tea, and he would have the tray brought in day by day, instead of having the cups handed round in the usual fashion.

This evening it was something of a relief to Cynthia to busy herself with tea-pot and cream-jug.

"Have you been long in this part of the world, Mr. Kennedy?"

"No; two days only. I brought Mr. Carlingford down to Dartmouth a week ago. He is going on a yachting trip with some friends for his health. Since then I have been wandering about the country. I do not know Devonshire at all."

"No? You will be pleased with it. It is a beautiful place."

"It is. Is this Lord Tremain's house that I have chanced upon to-night?"

Cynthia's colour rose very faintly.

"Yes," she answered, "this is Tremain."

"I did not know it when I came," he said, gravely and gently.

"No," she responded composedly. "You are a stranger in these parts; you would not be likely to know. Will you have some tea?"

Cicely and Gwendolyn now drew near, feeling it was the kindest thing to be done under the circumstances. Cicely endeavoured to draw Kennedy into conversation; Gwendolyn's eyes wandered furtively from his face to Cynthia's.

Cynthia was dressed in pale yellow brocade, with a profusion of rich old lace which produced a beautifully softening effect upon the antique texture it adorned. Costly pearls were clasped round her slender throat and white arms, and a sweet, heavy-scented flower was

fastened amongst the piled-up tresses of her hair. To-night her eyes were bright and shone like stars, and a delicate colour mantled her pale cheek. She looked very fragile and very lovely, and Gwendolyn's heart ached with a strange sense of pain, as she caught the young clergyman's eyes resting from time to time upon her.

Kennedy's face was a powerful one. Thin and worn with unceasing toil and unceasing thought, it looked like the face of one who had suffered much and suffered bravely, and had come out from the furnace of sorrow purified and ennobled by the ordeal thus passed.

The two once so near to each other, now hopelessly sundered, were calm and self-possessed enough. No one could have guessed, by simply watching them, that they had ever been anything but mere acquaintances. Gwendolyn herself could not even form a guess as to whether the old love had or had not been trampled out in both hearts.

"Are you still at St. Stephen's, Mr. Kennedy?" asked Lady Tremain presently.

"No; I was obliged to give it up. The work was too hard for me to undertake year after year. I cannot take things easily; I almost wish I could sometimes. I was obliged to resign my curacy in the summer."

"You look as if you had been ill. I always warned you that you would overdo it. Have you been nursing Mr. Carlingford?"

"Yes, for the past few weeks."

"That would be a great pleasure to him."

"A mutual pleasure, I think."

"And are you going to take a long holiday now?"

Cynthia was fanning herself gently, and asked these questions in a quiet, matter-of-fact way which Gwendolyn thought marvellous.

"I am to be at my post the first week in October," he answered.

"Where is your new post?"

He looked at her, and then at Cicely quickly, as if surprised; and then he said slowly,—

"I am going back to my old post at Holy Cross, as Mr. Carlingford's curate."

A flush slowly mounted to Cynthia's brow, and as slowly faded.

"I did not know," she answered quietly. "Cicely has only just arrived. I have not heard all the news. You will like your old berth again."

"I shall like to work under my best friend."

"You will be very warmly welcomed back by all. Your leaving was a great loss to the church."

Cynthia spoke with perfect composure. Kennedy answered with rather a peculiar smile,—

"You are kind to say so. It is pleasant to feel that we make friends where we go."

"You, I am sure, must always do that."

After this followed a silence which nobody seemed quite prepared to break. Cicely and Gwendolyn felt less able to speak naturally than the other two seemed to do, and these appeared to have exhausted their conversational powers.

The silence was broken in an unexpected manner by



a sudden vivid lightning flash, and a closely-following peal of thunder. It had been a close, still day, and a hotter evening, and the storm had gathered so rapidly that all were startled by this sudden herald. A second thunder-clap was followed by a deluge of rain, which seemed to fall in sheets upon the terrace.

"Dear, dear, what a storm!" exclaimed Lord Tremain, rising victorious from the chess-table. "I had no idea it was coming."

"Nor I," said Kennedy rising. "I ought not to have lingered so long. It is too violent, however, to last, I think. What a flash!"

"We are evidently going to catch it severely. The wind is rising. That howling always predicts a severe storm here. You will be obliged to remain our prisoner for to-night, Mr. Kennedy. It will be impossible for you to leave in or after such a storm as this."

"Indeed, Lord Tremain, I could not think of trespassing so upon your hospitality—"

"Cynthia," interrupted his lordship, "have you been giving me such a bad character that one of your old friends talks about trespassing upon our hospitality on a night when one would not turn a dog from one's door?"

The old man's face beamed as it always did when it was turned towards his wife. Cynthia, with a sweet and sudden smile in her grave eyes, advanced and laid her hand within his arm.

"My husband is quite right, Mr. Kennedy. You cannot leave Tremain to-night. The roads would be all but impassable after such rain."

"And you cannot but have come some way, for there is no place very near to us."

"No. I suppose Feltham must be some six miles away, by the road."

"Nearer nine," said Lord Tremain. "You could not possibly get there to-night; and I should be afraid even to trust a horse out, with so much lightning about."

"You will have to submit to my husband's will" said Lady Tremain, her hand still resting upon the old man's arm. "You must consent to be our guest to-night."

"My wife is mistress here, Mr. Kennedy," said Lord Tremain, smiling proudly and fondly. "We all do just as she tells us. So long as you do that, you are sure to be in the right."

Mr. Kennedy submitted, as indeed he could hardly fail to do. It was past ten already, and the storm was rather increasing than diminishing. It certainly would be impossible for any one to leave the castle then, and early hours were in vogue at Tremain.

Lord Tremain went back to his friend to chat over the chess-board. Cynthia retreated to her sofa, with a sign to Cicely to take the vacant seat beside her. Kennedy stood gazing abstractedly at the storm through the closed but uncurtained window, and when he moved it was to seat himself beside Gwendolyn.

Gwendolyn was nervous—she had seldom felt more so—but she was glad at all costs to keep Kennedy away from Cynthia. He was abstracted, and it was not easy to make talk; but she did her duty bravely, and had the satisfaction of interesting both herself and him be-

fore Lord Tremain carried off the guest to the smoking-room for the last half-hour before retiring.

Cicely, being somewhat fatigued by her journey, went up to her room; but Gwendolyn remained with Cynthia in the drawing-room.

After a few minutes' silence Cynthia said quietly,—

“An interesting man, is he not?”

“I should think he would be when he was more at ease.”

Cynthia smiled faintly.

“Ah yes! Rather trying for him, was it not, Gwendolyn? Poor Reginald! Do you think he minded?”

“I could not make out what he felt.”

“Nor I. I can't bear to think of all he has gone through on my account. I hope it is all over now. I hope this will not bring back any of the old feeling.”

Cynthia spoke naturally and gently. Gwendolyn, remembering what she had once said about the endurance of her own love, could not forbear asking,—

“Does it not bring it back to you?”

Cynthia was silent a moment, and then answered,—

“I am married, Gwendolyn.”

Gwendolyn felt rebuked and relieved by the tone. She said, after a pause, and half against her will,—

“Does marriage change everything, Cynthia?”

“I think it has changed me,” was the quiet answer.

Gwendolyn, who knew something of the pain of hopeless love, could not but wish for further enlightenment. She looked earnestly at her companion.

“I wish you could tell me how you feel.”

Cynthia smiled her curious enigmatical smile.

"The same old Gwendolyn, always craving for information, always desiring a metaphysical analysis! Did you ever analyze your own feelings as you expect me to do mine?"

"Yes, often; but I find yours more interesting."

"Mine are soon described. Do you remember the song you used to like so much,—

' On my hearth, where the flames leapt high,  
Now ashes alone shall be ' ?

That is, I think, my state—ashes that no flame will rekindle. It is much better than the old smouldering state, which a breath could fan to a flame."

Gwendolyn considered.

"Do you think he feels the same?"

"I cannot guess at his feelings, but I do not believe his heart could ever be dead like mine. He has it kept alive by other love. If he could forget me, I believe he could love again, and love well."

"And you?"

"I? Never again. The ashes of a dead love are all I shall ever have to cherish."

"And your husband's love?" said Gwendolyn.

A softer look stole over Cynthia's face.

"Ah yes. My husband's love!" she said. "I have that, and I may keep and cherish it. That always makes a wife's true happiness, does it not?"

"I believe it is making you happier," said Gwendolyn, steadily, not allowing it to be seen that she was making this statement at a venture.

"That is well," returned Cynthia smiling. "There is enough of it to make any woman happy."

Before a reply could be made, Lord Tremain entered the room.

"Alexander and Mr. Kennedy are talking politics so earnestly, that I have left them to smoke and argue at their leisure. I daresay they will be at it till midnight. He seems a clever young man, your friend, Cynthia; a clergyman, is he not?"

"Yes. I think you have forgotten his name. He is the Reginald Kennedy I told you about, to whom I was once engaged."

"Engaged?"

"Yes, engaged to be married. Don't you remember I told you that I had been engaged before, when you asked me to marry you?"

"Ah! yes, I remember perfectly. So that was the man, was it? A nice fellow he is, too. What an odd coincidence! Poor boy! I hope he does not mind it."

"Mind what?"

A smile was hovering over Cynthia's face. There was something touching in the utter confidence of the old man in his young wife—something half pathetic, half amusing in the fact that his sympathy and care were all for the unsuccessful rival.

"Why, mind seeing you as my wife. I shouldn't like his feelings to be hurt, you know. I'm sorry enough for him, poor fellow. I'm afraid no man would ever get over loving you, Cynthia."

The fine old face looked honestly troubled and con-

cerned. Cynthia went forward and placed her hands upon her husband's shoulders, looking up into his eyes with a glance whose meaning Gwendolyn could not interpret. She felt almost like an intruder in this domestic scene, but she could not well escape, as it was hardly the moment to choose for her evening adieu.

"Tremain," said Cynthia gently, "you must not think that all men are like you. Constancy and devotion to one object is an attribute, I think, of a past generation. All love is not so single-hearted as yours, or so deeply rooted."

He looked into her face with his honest eyes brimful of love.

"I did have a wife once before, whom I loved," he said. "You must not make a paragon of me."

"Yes, and you remained forty years faithful to her memory. Tremain, I take it as the highest compliment you ever paid me, that after those forty years you should have loved me, and love me as you do."

"I cannot love you any other way," answered the old man simply; "you are my wife, you know," and he kissed her three times almost solemnly.

Cynthia stood silent and passive under his caresses; and then she took his weather-beaten, wrinkled hand, and laid her lips softly upon it.

Before he could remonstrate she said laughingly,—

"Here is poor Gwendolyn waiting to say good-night—a forced spectator of our conjugal felicity. We must really let her off now. This absorption is unpardonable."

So Gwendolyn said good-night, and left them together.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AN UNDERSTANDING.

THE party at Tremain was destined to see a good deal of Reginald Kennedy during the ensuing days.

The master of the house had taken a great liking for the grave young clergyman, and felt, in his generous, chivalrous fashion, as if he owed him some sort of reparation for the untimely fate of his young romance. His mind was too nobly simple, and his powers of thought too much shaken, for his head to be troubled by doubts or fears or misgivings of any kind.

Cynthia was his true, loyal wife, and Kennedy was a brave, good man. They had once been friends, and more than friends; and if they could still take pleasure in each other's society—pleasure unmixed with pain—why should they not meet frequently and enjoy a renewal of friendship upon a new footing?

Such thoughts as this he expressed to his wife, and Cynthia answered gently,—

“Do as you and he like, Tremain. If he likes to come here, and you enjoy his visits, let him come. Cicely likes Reginald, and I think he is interested in her.”

"Ah yes, that would be the very thing!" cried Lord Tremain with animation. "Cicely is a good, clever girl, and would make him a capital wife. That would soon console him for a past disappointment, would it not? You would be glad to see him happily married, would you not?"

"I should like him to be happy—yes," answered Cynthia quietly; and in a voice too low to catch his ear, she added, "Why should two lives be spoiled?"

So Kennedy came often to Tremain, and if he saw little of Cynthia, he improved his acquaintance with Cicely and Gwendolyn; and after a few visits Lord Tremain persuaded him to make a short stay at the castle, to meet his old friend Bertie Heron, who was expected almost at once. Kennedy demurred somewhat, but consented at length to do as was suggested. He was looking better already for his rest and change, and the grave face had lost something of its pallor and sharpness of outline. A day or two's shooting over the moorland, Lord Tremain told him, would make a new man of him altogether; and so he consented to pay the visit.

Cynthia took the news very quietly, only hoping that Tremain would not be overdone with so much company.

Lord Tremain, however, seemed to grow stronger and better as days went by. His old hospitable instincts had been aroused by the presence of visitors at the house, and he seemed to enjoy and thrive upon their society. A small home-like company such as the present was just what suited him. He had no trouble or sense of responsibility weighing upon him. He



could leave everything in the hands of his wife, secure that all would go well, and enjoy, for his own part, the pleasure of seeing bright faces round his table, and hearing a pleasant hubbub of young voices about the silent halls and corridors of Tremain.

Cicely sometimes used to say that Lord Tremain was the most perfectly contented man she had ever yet come across. When she once said something of the kind to him, he answered in his simple way,—

“You see your sister is my wife,” as if that explained everything.

So under these rather peculiar circumstances Reginald Kennedy came as a visitor to Tremain.

Two or three days passed, somewhat restless, unquiet days. Bertie Heron had been delayed, and Kennedy was thrown very much into the society of the ladies at the castle. Lord Tremain and his friend always welcomed him kindly, but he felt it an intrusion to be always in their company, and the old nobleman seemed distressed if ever he found his guest wandering about alone.

So Cynthia, Cicely, and Gwendolyn saw a good deal of him, and an indefinable change crept over them all. Old intimacy seemed gradually to assert itself, and by the end of the week the restless, uncomfortable constraint had almost passed, and a friendly footing been established between them all.

Cynthia was the most cold and quiet, but she seemed once more herself and at ease, and Gwendolyn thought and hoped that the worst of the pain was over.

On this point she was destined to hear something more.

Cynthia called her into her turret-room one day at dusk. She was sitting alone in the glow of a little fire, and her face wore a quiet but not unhappy look.

"Well, Gwendolyn," she said, "will you be pleased or horrified to hear that I have had it all out with him?"

"With whom?"

"With Reginald, of course."

"What have you done? I don't understand."

"Nothing very astounding. I felt it would have to come, and he has felt the same these past days. I am sure of it. He came here by chance an hour ago. I was alone, and we had it out together."

"What do you mean?"

"I told him that I wanted to be sure his life had not been spoiled. I asked him if he saw now that I was not the wife he really wanted. I told him that I had loved him once, but that my nature was not deep enough for his. I told him I could almost be happy again, if I could be certain I had not spoiled his life."

"What did he say?"

"He said he felt just the same regarding me. He did me the justice to be certain that though it was I who had, in the end, broken off the engagement, I had done it under moral compulsion, and that I had felt it as much as he. He would not admit that our love had been a mistake; and he said that love was in itself so far ennobling, that if he could but be certain that my life had not been spoiled, my soul imbittered by what had happened, he could look with quiet resignation on

the past, and not allow his shattered hopes to take away all that was left of happiness."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that my life had not been spoiled; that I could feel as he did—that I too wished for this assurance on his side."

"Was he glad? You are sure you were telling him the truth?"

"Yes, so far as I know it. As I told you before, I told him then. The flame is burned out, and only the ashes are left."

"Has he only ashes left too?"

"His heart is larger than mine. He has food for love of which I know nothing. His heart has never died to love."

"Did you tell him that yours had?"

"No. He was so anxious to be assured that there was happiness still for me in my husband's love. He would take no denial but that there was a possibility of that. He is generous and high-minded, is Reginald. Some men would have wished me to be miserable in my marriage."

"If he is high-minded so are you," smiled Gwendolyn. "Some women would wish *him* always to be unhappy for their sakes. What did you tell him about Lord Tremain?"

Cynthia looked into the fire, and answered slowly,—

"I told him just the truth. If he thinks me fickle, I cannot help it. If he thinks I never really loved him, I do not feel as though it would matter much now.

When I married, I never hoped for real love or happiness. I thought all that was over for me, and that it mattered little what became of me; but now, I don't know how it is, but Tremain loves me so truly and so well that I cannot but love him a little too. He has fairly shamed me into love with his tender, chivalrous devotion. I cannot help myself. I must love him."

"O Cynthia!" cried Gwendolyn, "I am so glad! I am so very glad!"

"Are you? Yes; I believe it. I am glad too. Poor Tremain! It seemed so hard to have nothing to give him back in return for such devotion."

"You were very good to him."

Cynthia lifted her eyebrows.

"I had no choice. One cannot give a stone when asked for bread. Mine was a poor enough imitation, but I could not offer less."

"And now?"

"Now, perhaps, he will not even know the difference; but I shall know."

"Cynthia," said Gwendolyn, "when did you find this out?"

"Only just now, as I was thinking over the fire before Reginald came in."

"Will you be happy now, Cynthia?" she asked wistfully.

Cynthia's face put on a grave, melancholy, smiling look, sadder than tears.

"I have almost begun to doubt if there is such a thing as real happiness," she said.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### LADY ALLARDICE AT TREMAIN.

It was something of a surprise to all the party at Tremain when Lady Allardice, with only a post's warning, suddenly appeared in their midst.

About three weeks had elapsed between this arrival and the conversation narrated in the last chapter, and Reginald Kennedy's holiday was all but expired, and Bernard had been Mrs. Knollys' guest for ten days or more, and had spent the bulk of his time at Tremain, shooting over the covers with Bertie Heron and his brother-in-law.

Nobody looked for Lady Allardice's arrival. Nobody had supposed it possible that she would be able to leave Condoover during the shooting season; yet so it was.

The morning's post brought to Cynthia a dainty little scented note, containing information of her mother's prospective arrival that same afternoon; but how it was possible for her to arrange for such a visit, with her own house full of guests, she did not explain in her letter.

The announcement was received without any great

enthusiasm by the party to whom Cynthia communicated her news. Lord Tremain said he should be delighted to see Lady Allardice; but Cynthia and Cicely exchanged glances which could hardly be said to express delight.

Lady Allardice had certainly been invited to Tremain. Her decision therefore could not be complained of; but it did not appear as though the prospective visit gave much pleasure to any one.

"Why is she coming?" asked Cicely of her sister, when the gentlemen had gone out into the hall to look at the weather and discuss the day's prospects.

"Ah, why?" returned Cynthia, her lip curling slightly—"why indeed?"

"I can't understand how it is she can get away from Condovery; I know they have people there."

"Did you ever know mamma fail in doing just what she wished to do?"

"But what can be her reason?" went on Cicely, who looked somewhat disturbed.

"The reason is not far to seek," answered Cynthia. "She is coming to look after us all. What could be more natural or maternal?"

"Who wants looking after?" asked Gwendolyn with a smile. "Are you not considered competent in your capacity as Lady Tremain to look after us all?"

"Hardly, in mamma's estimation, I fear," answered Cynthia, with a faintly ironical smile. "I fancy I am the one who wants the most looking after."

"You!"

"Yes. Poor mamma was sadly scandalized when she heard that Reginald had stayed here a few days three weeks ago. Now that Tremain has persuaded him to be our guest again for the last week of his holiday, I suppose she thinks it time that somebody, more worldly-wise than my chivalrous Bayard of a husband, was on the spot to look after me."

"Cynthia!" exclaimed Gwendolyn. "Aunt Allardice never could think that!"

"Mamma's thoughts are doubtless of too complex a nature to bear close analysis," returned Cynthia coolly. "No doubt she has her fears on your account and Bernard's, lest you should again ensnare his young affections; and I daresay she hardly approves of Bertie's sojourn here during Cicely's visit. Everybody is very fond of Bertie; but of course he is hopelessly ineligible without prospects or profession. You see, with so many oddly assorted elements in the house, and no chaperon but my humble self, mamma may be pardoned for her reasonable anxieties."

But when Lady Allardice arrived anxiety seemed an absurd word to apply to her condition of mind. She was full of brightness, of affection, of enthusiasm for all she saw about her. In her delight and pride and satisfaction she appeared younger than her daughter.

"My dearest girl! my sweet Cynthia! how charming, how delightful it all is! You cannot believe how I have longed to see Tremain, and my child reigning there! I felt at last that nothing should keep me away. I told papa he must have a bachelor party and manage

for himself, for that I positively *must* visit my Cynthia in her own home. We soon had matters in train; and here I am, you see, more pleased to be here than I can say."

"I hope you will enjoy yourself, mamma," returned Cynthia. "I'm afraid you will not find Tremain so gay as Condoover."

"My dearest Cynthia! as though I cared for gaiety when I have my children about me."

"Ah, true! I had forgotten that. You have not had us all together for some while now. We shall be quite a united family party."

"Indeed, yes; it will be most delightful. Gwendolyn seems always like a daughter to me" (here a certain faintly satirical look in Cynthia's eyes caused Lady Allardice to trip slightly over her words; but after a moment's hesitation she continued as enthusiastically as ever); "and your Aunt Knollys, my dearest sister Magdalene, I suppose you see a good deal of her. It will be delightful to meet her again."

"Aunt Knollys comes here from time to time; she and Gwendolyn are great friends."

Gwendolyn's smile unconsciously corroborated this statement, and an impression seemed produced upon Lady Allardice which caused her for a moment or two to grow grave and thoughtful.

"Here come the men," said Cynthia, breaking the brief silence. "I think you are acquainted with them all, mamma. What a good thing!"

Lady Allardice was very gracious and graceful in her



reception of the many greetings pressed upon her. Nobody knew better than she did how to avoid the least appearance of embarrassment even in an awkward situation, and she met young Kennedy in her daughter's married home with all the ease of manner that she would have evinced towards a perfect stranger.

Then and throughout the evening, as was but natural, Lord Tremain devoted the greater part of his time to the entertaining of his youthful mother-in-law; but Lady Allardice, whilst giving all apparent attention to the urbane conversation of her host, took in the full meaning of what passed around her, and let nothing pass unheeded.

Reginald Kennedy's time was growing short. The next day but one would see him resume his old duties in London under Mr. Carlingford.

This visit to Devonshire, and particularly that part of it spent at Tremain, had been of incalculable benefit to him physically and mentally. Indeed to him and to Cynthia both had great comfort been given, for to both had been vouchsafed a conviction, partly sad, yet far more consolatory, that the blight which had fallen upon their young lives' romance had not destroyed for ever the budding and blossoming of hope within each heart, and that possibly each life might be the more noble and even the more happy for the trial which had overshadowed it, and from the very fact that they had not to be passed together. Possibly Cynthia might not have learned the patient self-sacrifice she was now exercising towards her old and failing husband had she

been the wife of Reginald Kennedy. Yet was it not a necessary result of patience and self-renunciation that her nature should come out from the trial purified and ennobled? If the change was not yet plainly observable, was that any reason why it was not going on unseen in the recesses of a reserved and imbibittered heart? Would not time drive out the bitterness, and leave in its place a subdued and chastened happiness, such happiness as can only be experienced after long and earnest strivings of spirit leading from darkness to light?

Since the mutual admission between the sometime lovers, an understanding of a pleasant and satisfactory nature had been established between them. They could converse without a shade of embarrassment, and took a quiet and healthy interest in each other's thoughts and concerns.

"I shall be sorry when you leave Tremain," said Cynthia that evening as he sat beside her; "we shall miss you very much. I hope you will visit us at some future time when you have a holiday."

"I should be delighted to do so. Perhaps we shall meet in London before so very long."

Cynthia shook her head with a faint smile.

"I fear not. I see no prospect yet of my husband's being in a fit state to encounter the bustle and excitement of town life. He seems wonderfully well just now, I admit; but it is only the quiet regularity of our life here and our pure, bracing air that keep him so. I doubt sometimes whether he will ever be fit for a stay in town."

"You must find the changed life very trying sometimes," said Kennedy, with something of sympathetic concern. "Do you not feel to require for yourself some of your accustomed resources?"

"I think I am adapting myself to circumstances," answered Cynthia smiling. "I feel very comfortably settled here, and my cousin Gwendolyn has promised me a long visit. I do not feel as if I even cared to come to town, except to see more of Cicely."

"Cicely must miss you," remarked Kennedy, with a look of interest. When in confidential talk, the familiar Christian names were apt to slip out unheeded on both sides.

"I believe she does. I believe we both miss each other more than we anticipated. Reginald, do you remember the days when you used to tell me I did not appreciate Cicely?"

"I believe I do."

"Well, I begin to see now that you were right. I don't think I did appreciate her then."

"And now?"

"Now I am beginning to do so. I think I understand her better, Reginald." Here Cynthia leaned towards him and spoke in a lower and more earnest way. "I want to ask you not to lose sight of Cicely. You will have many chances of seeing her; do what you can for her, for you know she gets little guidance or sympathy at home. I need not mind saying this to you, for you know what our home is like."

His face expressed much earnestness and comprehension.

"I will do what I can for your sake and hers. It is just such natures as hers which most need some stimulating yet restraining presence about them, else they prey too much upon themselves. I wish she would let Mr. Carlingford help her."

"So do I now; but when I—before I was married I was just as averse to talk to him as Cicely is. Now I sometimes wish I had the chance. But Mr. Carlingford has been too much preached up to us from our childhood. You will have far more chance than ever he will of doing anything with Cicely. She was always fond of you, and we both believed in you sincerely from the first."

Cynthia smiled without bitterness, and Kennedy's earnest face flushed somewhat.

"Whatever I can do to help your sister, or make up to her in any way your loss, be sure I will not fail. As she interests herself so much in church work, we are likely to meet frequently."

"That is what I thought. I shall feel so much relieved to know there is some one near her who will understand and sympathize with her ideas. She has been more alone in that way even than I."

"I will do what I can," said Kennedy; "I will not forget your charge."

From such a man such a promise meant much, and Cynthia knew it.

"What it may lead to I cannot help," she said to herself. "Besides, why should I mind? I could not be happy without asking somebody to take care of Cicely."

If mamma has a plan in her head for her future, she will need help. It may be an unconventional way of doing it; but I know Reginald, and so does Cicely, and he is to be trusted."

Lady Allardice's evident uneasiness whilst this confidential conversation was proceeding afforded Cynthia a kind of scornful amusement. She was convinced that her mother mistrusted both her discretion and her strength of principle, and she felt a curious sense of indignation and contempt for any one who could harbour such unworthy suspicions.

When a move to the billiard-room left the ladies alone, Lady Allardice drew up her chair close to Cynthia's and commenced sounding her upon many points with the peculiar skill long practice had given her.

But Cynthia was her mother's own daughter in some respects, and had been brought up in the school in which her mother held a high place. Probe as Lady Allardice might, she could get no satisfactory answers from her daughter, although there was no appearance of reserve in Cynthia's manner.

At length she was driven to speak more plainly.

"My dearest child, you must not take offence; it is my mother's heart which makes me anxious. *Do* you think it quite wise—quite in good taste—to have that young man dangling after you in your husband's house?"

"What young man? I did not know anybody but Tremain was dangling after me."

"Cynthia, my love, this affectation of ignorance only

gives me the greater anxiety. You must know that I speak of Reginald Kennedy. Why is he here?"

"Tremain invited him. He likes Reginald immensely."

"It ought not to be. You ought not to deceive your too indulgent husband."

Cynthia's upper lip curled with involuntary scorn.

"It might be as well to make sure of your facts, my dear mother, before you make such accusations. I am not sensitive or resentful myself; but if Tremain had chanced to hear that remark, I doubt if even his courtesy would have sufficiently mastered his wrath so far as to permit you to sleep a night under his roof."

Lady Allardice looked taken aback, but she was not to be thus silenced.

"My dearest child, I see more and more plainly by your anger how serious is the matter of which you would fain make light. Believe me, things must not go on in this way. I shudder to think of the result. Either you must tell your husband, or I must."

Cynthia's eyes flashed as her mother had never seen them flash before.

"Tell him what?" she asked haughtily.

"About your engagement with Reginald Kennedy."

Cynthia laughed a curious, mirthless laugh.

"I certainly should advise you to tell him, and see what you would gain by it. If it leads to a quarrel, do not say I did not warn you. Tremain is very sensitive where I am concerned."

Lady Allardice sat silent, feeling more nonplussed than she liked to admit.

"Mamma," said Cynthia in quiet tones, "why did you not tell Tremain of it before our marriage?"

"My dear child, there was no need. It would have been foolish, absurd, romantic."

"Why?"

"Why? My dear, you must know such frankness is neither necessary nor advisable under such circumstances."

"Should not a man know all there is to know about the woman he means to make his wife?"

"I should say so Utopian an idea would do far more harm than good."

"In plain terms, you think that my prospects might have been damaged by that story reaching Tremain's ears before our marriage; but that afterwards, when we are indissolubly bound together, he had better learn it all, and that I have kept an important secret from him all this while."

"You have a very disagreeable way of putting things, Cynthia; but it certainly seems to me time that your husband was told."

Cynthia rose slowly, and faced her mother more in sorrow than in anger.

"I am your daughter. I was brought up under your eye, so perhaps you have the right to speak to me as you choose; but remember, mother, yours was not the only influence brought to bear upon me in the days of my girlhood. For a year and more Reginald was my ideal and my pattern, and from him I learned how to speak the truth fearlessly. Upon the night Tremain asked

me to be his wife, I told him the whole story of my engagement; and since we have been married he has often told me that that evidence of confidence and of candour set a seal upon the love he bore me. Say what you will, do what you will, my husband will never doubt me now. Had I followed the counsels you would have given me, could I ever have said the same?"

And Cynthia walked in her most stately way to the small drawing-room, whither Gwendolyn and Cicely had retired, leaving Lady Allardice to digest this summary as best she might.

Lady Allardice could not candidly say that she enjoyed her visit at Tremain. She experienced a curious sensation of loss of power over the children she once felt to control with ease. Cynthia in particular seemed greatly changed, as though she viewed life and life's problems from a different standpoint, and no longer submitted her mother to direct her conduct or her thoughts.

More and more apparent did it become that Cynthia looked back with both bitterness and regret to the past years of her girlhood. Lady Allardice considered her hard and foolish and unjust, and could not think what had come over her. She said as much to her one day in Mrs. Knollys' hearing (Mrs. Knollys came over frequently to see her sister at Tremain); and she had smiled in her curious inward way, as if she perhaps knew more about it than the young countess's mother seemed to do.

"Has anything come over me?" questioned Cynthia languidly. "I am sure I do not know. I suppose



when people marry they are allowed to settle down into comfortable idleness and satiety. I have made myself into a countess under your generalship. Surely I have fulfilled my duty in life? You can hardly expect more of me than that."

"It is not a question which admits of argument, dear child," returned Lady Allardice sweetly. "I do not think it quite wise or right for you to settle down into this state of apathetic idleness and cynical disdain of the world; but my authority is now at an end, and you must please your own fancy and your husband's.—I am sure, Magdalene, that you will agree with me."

The three "matrons" were alone together when this conversation took place. Cicely and Gwendolyn had walked out to meet the sportsmen, leaving the married women to sit together over the fire. It was the last day of Lady Allardice's stay in her daughter's house, and she was piqued and dissatisfied by the unsatisfactory result of her visit. In reply to this appeal against Cynthia, Mrs. Knollys replied quietly,—

"Sometimes I fancy that Cynthia is neither so apathetic nor so cynical as appears."

A faint smile flickered over Cynthia's face. Of late, and especially since her mother's arrival, she had softened somewhat towards Mrs. Knollys, although the change as yet had been hardly perceptible.

"I like people to be what they seem to be," returned Lady Allardice incisively. "I have a prejudice against deception."

"Ah yes, of course," murmured Cynthia gently, and a silence fell suddenly upon the party.

Mrs. Knollys broke it by changing the subject.

"Lord Tremain seems very much better, Cynthia. I am quite surprised each time I see him by the increase of power he shows."

"Yes, I think he surprises us all. I know he has astonished the doctors. They feared an entire break up of the constitution a few months back."

"I know; and they attribute his wonderful rally to the untiring devotion of his wife, and the restful state of satisfaction produced by her constant presence."

Cynthia would not allow herself to evince any sign of gratification.

"Tremain is the easiest man in the world to deal with. He has roughed it so much in his bachelor days that the smallest attentions almost overwhelm him."

"When shall you come to town?" asked Lady Allardice. "I suppose you will spend Christmas there. This place will soon become intolerable, with its never-ceasing moan of wind and sea. If I were you, I should establish myself in Palace Gardens very soon, and remain there through the season, with just a few weeks at Easter for change of air and scene."

"I think it more than probable," answered Cynthia quietly, "that we shall not come to town at all."

Lady Allardice listened aghast whilst Cynthia enumerated a few cogent reasons for this opinion. What was the use of having a daughter married to an earl with a princely fortune, if she was never coming to live

in her town house and keep a miniature court there? Why, if Tremain's health were so uncertain as that, it was a pity he lingered on at all.

"My dear child, you must not give way to fancies. I am sure Tremain is not much out of health. He ought to make an effort for your sake. I shall tell him so."

"Excuse me, mamma, but you must not. Besides, I have no wish at all to go to town. I am used to the life here, and like it."

"You might as well be buried alive at once."

"I think on the whole it is preferable to be buried alive than to live upon the social treadmill, which works all night and all day. Any way I am content."

"You are growing selfish, I fear, Cynthia. You should think of your family. Remember all I have done and sacrificed for you. Think of Bernard and Cicely—how much you might do for them."

Mrs. Knollys had risen during this discussion, and was now walking slowly away out of ear-shot. It always seemed to pain her when Cynthia and her mother fell into a discussion of a similar nature to this.

"Mother," said Cynthia gravely, "I will not affect to misunderstand you. You wish me to turn match-maker, and find an heiress for Bernard and a nobleman for Cicely. But understand once for all, I will not do it. It is no doing either of yours or mine that my life is not a ruined, miserable, loveless existence. I deserve that it should be so; it is only Tremain's tenderness and nobility that have saved me from it. But you and I both know whether it was for these qualities that I

married him. I am a countess—one of your children has made a brilliant match—let that content you. You cannot coerce or influence Cicely as you could me; so you might just as well give up the idea, and let her follow the dictates of her own heart.”

“Cicely is eccentric, unreasonable, unmanageable. She is just as likely as not to form some low or romantic attachment perfectly out of the pale of society. I must think and plan for her, else I should be no true mother. Now at Condoover there is a very nice, suitable young man; and if you are not prepared to help to anything better—”

“I have heard of him,” answered Cynthia coldly; “a wild, dissipated, brainless fellow—fit match, indeed, for Cicely! No, mother; you had better give up that game at the outset. Cicely has appealed to me, and I have given her my promise. If you try to entangle her with him, I shall have to step in and interfere. You would not like to make an enemy of me.”

“Did any mother ever have such undutiful children!” cried Lady Allardice in an unusual tumult of anger and dismay; but she could not meet the sad, reproachful, mournful gaze which her daughter turned upon her.

“Can anything bring my mother and me together again?” was the thought of Cynthia’s heart. “I know I am wrong and hard; but how can I help it?”

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### CICELY'S CONFIDENCE.

Six months had passed away quietly and quickly, when Gwendolyn found herself once more in the London express on her way to her aunt's house in Grosvenor Square.

It was a bleak day in early March, and the country through which the train whirled her looked pinched up and dried to the verge of desolation by the keen east wind. The traveller drew her furs more closely about her; for in the sheltered, west-coast nook where Tremain stood these bitter winds seldom penetrated.

Gwendolyn had been Cynthia's guest ever since that day in August when she had flown to the shelter of her cousin's home in all the misery and desolation of her first real and deep trouble. Cynthia had stood her friend and her champion all through that trouble, and through the minor struggles which had to be fought out on one side or another before her affairs could be reduced to the simple state which she desired. Lady Allardice was not the only adviser who warmly and determinedly counselled the sale of Wylmington, for

which Mr. Salisbury by-and-by made a handsome offer ; and but for Cynthia's quiet setting down of any attempt at coercion, Gwendolyn felt she might sometimes have been tempted to yield.

As it was, she had stood firm, and was still the mistress of Wylmington, but no longer an heiress, for she had barely three hundred a year saved from the wreck of her fortune. So long as Wylmington let as at present she was fairly well off ; but should it stand empty, as was always possible, she would be in the eyes of some of her relatives and friends little better than a pauper.

Gwendolyn was well aware of this, and gave the matter some little serious thought. Reluctant as she and Cynthia had been to part, she had felt that in London she might better be able to mature the plans which from time to time floated through her head than she could do in the shelter of Tremain.

Lady Allardice had sent her several invitations of late ; and at length it had been decided that she should leave Tremain for six or eight weeks and spend that time with her aunt, who seemed inclined to be all maternal fondness again.

"I do not quite understand it," Cynthia had said, "but I daresay it will be revealed to you all in good time."

Gwendolyn had plenty of food for thought as the train bore her through the country at express speed.

Her face had changed somewhat during the past months, and had attained a sweetness and serenity which

it had not known during the more brilliant and sheltered years of her girlhood. She looked older than she had done six months ago; but it seemed as though it was thoughtful, earnest purpose, and not care or sorrow, that had left its stamp upon her face.

Yes, Gwendolyn had learned now the lesson she had been striving to master ever since her father's death, which had wakened her soul from its apathy and self-satisfaction. She had found the light after which she had so long been groping, and the darkness had melted away from her own heart and her future life.

The light had not come this time, as it did before, in a blinding, dazzling flood, which had faded gradually away, hardly missed until a trouble fell and blotted out all the fair promise which had seemed to be hers for ever. This time the light had dawned slowly and steadily upon her. It was as if some one had come gently to her, over the troubled sea of life, and had said, "It is I; be not afraid."

Jesus had come, and had made the darkness light by his presence. All fear and sorrow had fled away, and a settled peace had fallen upon one troubled heart, very different from the exultant joy and confidence with which it had once been filled.

When Gwendolyn spoke of this to the aunt who had become her confidante now upon these matters, Mrs. Knollys smiled tenderly and said,—

"Ah, my child, I think we all have experiences like that at the beginning of our Christian life. We begin to see the light; but we trust too much in ourselves and

too little in the redeeming love of Christ, and so we lose our hold upon the blessed truths we think we have firmly grasped. It is like seed sown upon stony ground. It starts up into active life almost at once ; but it lacks root, and cannot bear the burning heat of sorrow, and so withers away. I think every one knows what that stage is. It is so easy to put our faith in our own feelings whilst they are so strong and warm ; but feeling has but a small part to play in a religion of fact and wonderful, living reality. Think of Christ's love, of God's fatherhood, of the Spirit's regenerating power, and let your feelings take care of themselves. When the heart is fixed, the rest follows as a matter of course."

Under her Aunt Magdalene's teaching, therefore, Gwendolyn had made a careful study of her Bible and of other books of great though minor importance. The library at Tremain had given her many facilities for reading which she might not otherwise have attained, and she had made good use of her opportunities.

She had read the history of Christian thought ever since its earliest days. She had followed the working of master minds, who had had to fight out far fiercer battles with doubt and distrust than had ever assailed her in her darkest days. She had read thoughtfully, mastering what she read as she went along ; and she found that her aunt had spoken no more than the truth when she had told her what a help and a support such study could give, and how necessary a part of spiritual education it formed.



And now Gwendolyn, strengthened in mind and body, and armed from the darts of every foe by a strength greater than her own, was going out again into the world (so at least she told herself) to face more changes and perhaps more trouble. She had promised to return to Tremain after her visit to town; but she had begun to say to herself that she could not live always as her cousin's guest, and that she must make up her mind what she was to do with her life.

Meditating and pondering earnestly yet not unhappily, reviewing the past and glancing curiously towards the future, Gwendolyn found that time slipped rapidly away, and that her journey had reached its end.

The noise and confusion of the London terminus struck her as unfamiliar and bewildering, and she was glad when the Allardice livery appeared looming out of the gas-lit dimness, and she was relieved from all further trouble and responsibility.

Cicely was waiting to welcome her when the carriage drew up before the familiar house. Lady Allardice had been obliged to be out—a most important engagement which could not be set aside. She left many regretful messages; but neither cousin seemed overwhelmed by regret at the absence.

Cicely was not as communicative all at once as Cynthia would have been under similar circumstances; but she welcomed Gwendolyn warmly, and in one so habitually reserved, warmth of manner meant a good deal.

When, after a few preliminaries, the two girls settled

themselves comfortably over a blazing fire, with the tea-tray drawn up between them, Gwendolyn could not but be forcibly reminded of her first arrival at this very house, not much more than a year ago. It had been a distinct epoch in her life. Would this be another?

Cicely was eying her with an odd sort of smile; and meeting her glance, Gwendolyn smiled too.

"Well?" said Cicely.

"Well?" returned Gwendolyn. "What were you thinking about so quizzically?"

"I think I was taking your measure."

"Explain yourself."

"I mean I was wondering how far you would lend yourself to the part you are expected to play."

Gwendolyn's eyebrows went up.

"You grow more and more mystical and mysterious. Tell me what you mean."

"Have you any idea why you have been so pressingly invited here of late?" asked Cicely.

"No."

"Then, perhaps, you may be interested to learn that mamma has found a mission for you."

"A mission for me!"

"Yes; you ought to be very grateful, I am sure, for the interest she still takes in you, after all your folly and ingratitude."

"Don't mimic your mother, Cicely," said Gwendolyn, who could rebuke this cousin better than the imperturbable Cynthia. "Tell me what mission she has found for me. I feel quite ready for one."

"Your mission," answered Cicely slowly, "is to marry a clergyman."

"Marry a clergyman!" echoed Gwendolyn half impatiently. "What are you talking about, Cicely?"

"About your future career. Of course, you cannot now look for a grand match, such as you might have made last season if the fates had been propitious; but still there is no reason why you should not settle down to a very pleasant and useful life, and find a very good husband. From what mamma has heard lately, she thinks that your vocation is to be a clergyman's wife; and therefore are you summoned here."

Gwendolyn could not restrain a smile, although there was a ring of sadness in the tone in which her next words were uttered.

"Has Aunt Allardice forgotten already what is only half a year old yet?"

Cicely looked at her, and answered coolly,—

"No; mamma does not forget things. Perhaps she thinks more of it than I should; for I can't believe you still entertain any very sad regrets for Sir Kenrick Dalrymple."

Gwendolyn was silent. In her heart she knew that Cicely spoke no more than the truth. She had learned to feel thankful that it was not her fate to tread life's path by his side; but a certain faithfulness and loyalty, which was a strong element of her nature, made it hard for her to admit so much.

Cicely, however, waited for no answer. After a moment's pause she added,—

"A decent interval has now elapsed, and you may be supposed to be capable of new feelings. You are no longer an heiress, but you have some small means of your own. Married to a clergyman, with private property, and abilities which will most likely enable him to rise, you would do very well and lead an exemplary life, as well as being entirely off your relations' hands. Do you not wish to know the name of the happy man selected for you?"

"Has any one in particular been selected?" asked Gwendolyn with a languid interest, for she thought Cicely might have spared her this conversation.

"Yes; Reginald Kennedy."

"Mr. Kennedy!"

"Yes; you are to play the part of decoy-duck and catch him."

Cicely was smiling in rather an enigmatical way. Gwendolyn saw that more was meant than met the ear.

"Mamma is afraid of Reginald," continued Cicely. after a pause; "that is the long and the short of the matter."

"Afraid of what?"

Cicely's colour had slightly risen, but she spoke composedly and coolly.

"Mamma is afraid of him in reference to me. We see a good deal of each other, although he does not come here very often. She has given over expecting to choose my husband for me. I think she despairs of my ever making a brilliant match; but she would rather,

I believe, have any man on earth for a son-in-law than Reginald Kennedy."

"Why? He is very good."

"Yes; rather too good, I sometimes think. He is a man of unimpeachable integrity, of an almost saint-like life, of a spotless pedigree. Yet, as I say, mamma cannot bear the thought of his becoming anything more to her than he is."

"How is that?"

"I think she feels he knows her too well."

Gwendolyn gazed thoughtfully into the fire, and then lifted her eyes to Cicely's face.

"May I ask you a question?"

"Yes."

"Does Mr. Kennedy want to marry you?"

Cicely's eyes did not waver as she answered,—

"I think he does; but he has not said anything yet."

"If he did, would you marry him?"

"Yes."

Then there was another silence. Gwendolyn was the first to break it.

"How much does Aunt Allardice know?"

"She knows nothing, but she suspects enough to make her uneasy. She thought, during those days at Tremain in the autumn, that Reginald admired and liked you (which he does); and so you are summoned to play the decoy-duck, and lure away the victim's thoughts into a safer channel. That at least is my conviction."

Gwendolyn sighed with a sense of dissatisfaction it was hard to put into words.

"Why must Aunt Allardice always have some plan in her head for somebody?"

"I believe it is her nature; I don't believe she can help it," said Cicely, speaking more gently of her mother than was her wont. "Some people, you know, do have inexplicable idiosyncrasies; and that, I do believe, is hers. I do not think she half understands the pain she gives other people. I believe she thinks she is acting for the best for us. It is very trying for us, of course; but perhaps we are hard on her too sometimes."

"It is not easy not to be," said Gwendolyn, who had seen enough of her aunt's scheming to speak feelingly.

"I know it is. I never thought about it in that way once; but Reginald spoke to me one day very gravely—pulled me up in something I was saying about mamma (you know he knew us so very well at one time that it is impossible not to treat him almost like one of the family), and said that he could not bear to hear me use that tone in speaking of my mother. I tried to defend myself, but it was no good. He made me see it could not be right, even though I may have excuse. I have tried ever since to keep in mind what he said. I believe mamma is to be pitied too. Reginald said so, and he is nearly always right."

"Why?"

"Because she has really thought for us after her own fashion a great deal, and in her own way I am sure she is fond of us; and yet she knows quite well that she has got neither our confidence nor sympathy, nor

much of our affection. Reginald thinks that at times she must feel this rather hard."

"It is her own doing," Gwendolyn was beginning, but she checked herself. She felt in her heart that Reginald Kennedy had spoken with a deeper and more Christ-like wisdom than any which was likely to proceed from her lips. "She ought not to mind your marrying Reginald, if he feels like that."

"Perhaps she will not when the time comes; but she must have her little game first, and therefore you are summoned. I believe she is so far softened that she will submit in the end, without the struggles she would once have made. I think she is sometimes sorry she alienated Cynthia, by thwarting her in her only true and deep love. I do not think she will run the same risk with me. If only she could believe it, my marriage with Reginald (if ever it came to that) would be a happy thing for her."

"I believe it would."

"I am sure of it. He would do her good. He does every one good."

"I can see he has done you good, Cicely."

"Yes, he has."

Gwendolyn clasped her hands tightly together upon her lap, and her face grew serious and sweet.

"I wonder if we have been learning the same lesson these past months?"

Cicely's reserve made her answer long in coming. Gwendolyn spoke again.

"I have learned what it is to be happy—happy and

at rest. I understand so much better the meaning of life. It is not all dark and hollow and confused as it used to be—not to me.” And then Gwendolyn thought of Cynthia and sighed.

“No, nor to me,” said Cicely.

Gwendolyn’s face lighted.

“I am glad,” she said. “You are happy now?”

“Happier than I ever used to be.”

“Is it because you—you and Reginald—are fond of each other?” asked Gwendolyn with momentary hesitation.

Cicely’s answer was spoken gravely and sweetly,—

“Apart from that, Gwendolyn, I am happier now.”

Each knew what the other meant.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### GWENDOLYN'S VOCATION.

GWENDOLYN had many pleasant friendships to renew, and many kindly welcomes to receive, when she found herself once more in the midst of a circle of which she had once formed a member.

Foremost amongst these old friends was Mr. Carlingford, who looked worn and wasted yet from his illness in the summer, more than ever like one in whom the spirit has triumphed over the flesh; and he greeted Gwendolyn with a tenderness and solicitude almost paternal.

She felt more drawn towards him than towards any one else, and it was to him that she first spoke of the vague plans for the future which were floating through her mind.

"I do not want to waste my life," she said one day, when she had an opportunity to speak with him quietly, unheard by any one else.

"I am sure you do not."

"And yet I hardly know what to do. It seems as though it ought to be easy to find suitable work; but

when one sets about to think, everything seems so impracticable."

Mr. Carlingford smiled kindly.

"You must not hurry yourself over your decision. If you are in earnest in your wish to lead a life of usefulness, be sure the opportunity will not be lacking; but do not force yourself into a work for which you are not fitted. Think soberly and calmly, and do not be in haste to take a step before you know where it will lead you."

Gwendolyn looked at him with grave, questioning eyes.

"I thought we ought to consider nothing but the end in view."

He smiled again gently and kindly.

"You think me a cool and calculating adviser, do you not, Miss Maltby? Perhaps if you had received as many deputations as I have from young ladies seeking or finding vocations, you would understand better why I bid you pause and think."

"But I have not got a vocation," said Gwendolyn humbly. "I wish I had."

"You have a vocation, Miss Maltby. Every one of us has that, whether we realize it or not."

"I a vocation!" said Gwendolyn wonderingly. "I do not understand. How can I have a vocation, situated as I am?"

"Ah, Miss Maltby, you have put the words into my mouth. 'Situated as I am.' Who is it that placed you in your present situation?"

Gwendolyn was silent.

"Do you think our Father ever so places us that we cannot work for him without leaving the position in which he has put us?"

"I thought—" began Gwendolyn, and then paused, not knowing exactly what to say.

"You thought perhaps that some circumstances made such service as you would like to render almost an impossibility?"

"Yes, almost."

"Believe me, no. I grant you that great difficulties lie in the path of many who are placed in a high social circle, and are surrounded by the careless and indifferent, perhaps by idle scoffers. But are not the very difficulties of the position a strong reason why it should not be abandoned? Ought we not to try and show that we can and will overcome difficulties, and live in the world, yet keep ourselves from the evil?"

Gwendolyn remembered how Bertie Heron had once said the same to her. She sighed as she answered,—

"I am afraid I am hardly strong enough for that. I feel as if it were all such a butterfly existence—that it would make a butterfly of me."

Mr. Carlingford looked grave.

"You must have faith," he said. "You must pray for help and for strength to avoid that. Some feel, as you say, that they must of necessity be drawn into the vortex, and that flight and flight alone can save them; but that is not to my mind the highest standpoint to take."

"But," objected Gwendolyn, "if everybody stayed just where they were placed, how much good work would never be done in the world."

"Quite so; I agree with you there. But now you are rushing to the opposite extreme. We were talking just now of the rule, not of the exceptions."

"Exceptions?"

"Yes. There are every now and then men, and women too, who feel urged and impelled by a strong power from within to abandon the life to which they are born, and adopt one of earnest, laborious work and self-sacrifice for the benefit of their fellow-men. Thank God that there do exist such spirits as these, from whose ranks we draw our district nurses, our city missionaries, our most earnest workers of every class. Many there are of them, though few in proportion to the number of those who go about seeking for a vocation; and most noble and Christ-like lives do they lead, many amongst them. A calling such as that must be well-pleasing in our Father's sight; but then it must always have been adopted in obedience to a call which is not given to us all."

"Are we not all called to follow Christ?"

"Most certainly; but not all by the same path. And the greatness and power of Christ are in no way more fully exemplified than by this fact, that we can follow him, and lead lives such as he would have us lead, in whatsoever state of life it has pleased him to place us."

Gwendolyn mused a while, and then asked timidly,—

"Then you think he has not called me to leave my

present life, and do those things we read about in memoirs ? ”

The clergyman smiled.

“ You and not I must be the judge upon that point, Miss Maltby ; but I think, if the call had come, you would not be in so much doubt.”

“ I don't know,” answered Gwendolyn, hesitating. “ I do very much want to be useful ; but I do not yet see what I can do.”

“ Keep your eyes open, Miss Maltby. Work is never very far to seek when we are in earnest.”

“ But about the call,” persisted the girl, anxious to reach the bottom of the subject. “ Do not a great many people think they have a call or a vocation, or whatever they call it ? ”

“ A very great many.”

“ And are they sometimes mistaken ? ”

“ Yes, not at all unfrequently.”

“ But I thought you said one could always tell ? ”

“ Not always without earnest thought and prayer. It is not difficult in cases like yours to decide that you have not so far felt any very urgent summons to quit the life which has been appointed as your lot ; but it is less easy to decide when some one comes forward burning with enthusiasm, convinced that a mission lies before him or her, and eager for a trial.”

“ How can you tell if they are in earnest ? ”

“ They always are in earnest ; but the question is, Is it earnestness of a right kind ? Many young girls come to us eager to join a sisterhood or a nursing home, or to

take up missionary work, who have no real reason to give for the wish save that they are not happy at home and want to try a new life. Some amongst these do well, and gradually learn to love the work for its own sake; but the majority, after a trial, grow weary, and go back to their homes, sadder and wiser than they came, or else throw themselves into some new 'vocation,' and so flit from one thing to another, doing little good to themselves or others. Often time alone can show who are the really earnest, prayerful workers, and who the excited and enthusiastic ones, who do not stand the burden and heat of the day. Life sets curious problems before us. Not the least curious or the easiest of solution is this one: How far are we justified in leaving that state of life to which God has called us, to look out for work which lies out of our path, instead of doing that which lies in it?"

Gwendolyn sat silent and thoughtful.

"I had not thought of that before."

"No. It is a question which I have had to study closely; but it was hardly likely to have suggested itself to you."

"I am glad to know it. It makes my life look clearer, and other lives too. I ought to have known better, I suppose; but I have sometimes felt as though some people, situated as they are, cannot be what they ought to be."

"Some circumstances of course are more favourable than others, and some positions are very trying; but God forbid that any one should say of any fellow-

creature that he *cannot* serve God without leaving the position in which God has placed him, and the duties which fall to the lot of one in that position."

"I see," said Gwendolyn. "I am glad!"

"Miss Maltby," said Mr. Carlingford, speaking now with an increased gravity and earnestness, "as we have said so much upon this subject, it is only fair to tell you that this is a point upon which many very excellent Christian people do not hold the view I have enunciated to you. I know people who think that no life can be satisfactory that does not to a greater or less extent renounce social duties and home ties, and go out into the by-ways to seek work there. I know people who think it higher, of necessity, for a woman to be a hospital-nurse, a toiler amid the slums, or a matron of an orphanage, than to live the life of a simple Christian amid the surroundings which fall naturally to her lot. *Of necessity*, I say, for I myself think most highly of all such vocations when entered upon in the right spirit; but I do say and earnestly believe that just as great a measure of blessing can rest upon those who take up their life in a right spirit, and are content to remain where they have been placed, and do the work which lies in the path before them."

"Yes," said Gwendolyn, "I hope so."

"I have known people," continued the clergyman, earnestly intent upon his own thought, "and good people, excellent Christian people too, who have shaken their heads sadly over the mass of those they designate 'nominal Christians' (I mean by this people who do believe

in the reality of religion and do desire to do their duty to God and man), and said with real distress that, because they live in a high social position and mix freely in the whirl of life, therefore they cannot be doing any good in the world, nor leading truly Christian lives. I have heard it said of them, because their duties lie there, that they live 'much for the world, and a little for Christ;' and when it is objected that the two are not of necessity opposed one to the other, then comes the quotation—or shall I say misquotation?—'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' God forbid that I should judge them. Who can say who is right upon so hard a problem? But I do shrink from hearing wholesale condemnation such as I have heard and quoted; for who are we to say of our fellows that they are not doing Christ's work, and setting a good example to others (more likely perhaps to be followed than a more ascetic one would be), because they are fulfilling the duties, social and otherwise, to which they were born? Who dare say that it is wrong to take a lively interest in 'worldly matters,' when we know who has made the world, and who has never yet said that such interests are wrong, unless they grow so strong as to exclude all else beside? The more I see of the world, the more I learn of its inner life, the more do I see and feel the deep need for earnest, conscientious Christians to take up their place in social circles, in the gay round of what always must and will prove the duties entailed by wealth and position, and to show whilst so doing that they are still Christ's faithful soldiers and servants, and that '*whatsoever* they do they



do it unto the Lord.' That, I believe, would do more for God's cause upon earth than many a crusade against the evils of the day. Let men once be convinced of the sanctifying power of God, of his willingness to bless each one of his children who will look to him for help and guidance amid the trivial round of daily duties, and I believe his name would cease to be blasphemed among them."

Mr. Carlingford had spoken with very deep feeling, and now paused and drew a long breath, turning towards Gwendolyn with his peculiarly luminous smile.

"I did not mean to preach you such a sermon, Miss Maltby; but you are so good a listener you tempted me on."

"Thank you so much," said Gwendolyn earnestly. "I am so glad you have explained it all."

"All!" repeated Mr. Carlingford smiling. "I am afraid the hydra-headed question will crop up many times in your path; but face it bravely, and do not fear it. Help will always be given when a decision has to be made. You will have guidance, I am sure, in the choice of your path."

"And I am not to think about a 'vocation' yet awhile," she said smiling, "but look out for my vocation in my daily life?"

"Just so, Miss Maltby." The clergyman was smiling himself now. "Remember what a complex machine this world of ours is. If we all felt a vocation for sick nursing or district visiting, what would become of the millions of poor people who live by the production of

costly fabrics and the delicacies of a refined civilization? Even the social 'butterfly' is doing a share (though a selfish one) in the great world work of relieving misery, and finding employment for our increasing poor. Let us not be in haste to condemn; let us not rush blindly away with the idea that all is hollow show that is not actual and visible work for God. Let us try instead to take a wider view, and watch how one thing works with another for good in that marvellous workshop of God's making—our world—and let us try to feel his presence in all things, and to serve him in every act of our lives. He has, with his ineffable and all-seeing love, told us that *all* we do *may* be done to his glory: it is our part to see that it *is* done to his glory, and not to ourselves."

"I see, I understand," said Gwendolyn, sudden tears of earnest feeling standing in her eyes. "I should like to make that my vocation."

"You could not have a nobler one," answered Mr. Carlingford with an equal intensity of feeling. "May God be your guide and pattern now, and in every step of the life that lies before you!"

And so, quite quietly and unexpectedly, Gwendolyn found and accepted her vocation.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A VICTORY.

SOME weeks of quiet, uneventful happiness now followed for Gwendolyn. A sense of rest and peace had fallen upon her, since the resolve recorded in the last chapter had been taken. Her future still lay shrouded in obscurity. She could not yet see how her life would turn. She was in a sense homeless, in a sense poor; and at some time or other she would have to face the question, what should she do with the main bulk of her time and energies? But at present both were bespoken.

Cicely seemed to need her now. Cynthia had extracted the promise of another long visit before many weeks had elapsed; and her Aunt Magdalene had asked her, with much tender feeling, to look upon her house as a home, so long as she could make herself happy under the care and in the companionship of an "old woman like herself."

Gwendolyn was simply and serenely happy. The cravings of her nature had been fully satisfied by those simple words, "Do *all* things to the Lord." They laid at rest the uneasy, restless longings for work for which

she had felt no natural aptitude, and yet which she had felt might be her duty to do. She could see now how much work for God lay in her daily path, that path from which she would once have forced herself to turn aside, not considering whose hand had placed her there.

She found that there was much she could do for her Aunt Allardice, who missed the companionship her eldest daughter had given her, and seemed more grateful for Gwendolyn's attentions than she at all expected her to be. This touched the girl's heart, and helped her to feel more patient and gentle when her aunt indulged in the strain of speculative aspirations in regard to the future of her children and of others, and to restrain the old feelings of contemptuous pity, keeping in mind what Reginald Kennedy had said about the allowance to be made for the natural bent of such dispositions. It seemed to her at times that this gentle consideration which she strove after was not exercised in vain, and that Lady Allardice was growing, by almost imperceptible degrees, less narrow and worldly in her views, and listened with a more sincere interest to what Gwendolyn told her of the work she and Cicely undertook for the sick and poor.

For Gwendolyn was now Cicely's best friend and helper, and two mornings in each week were passed in district work amid the poor and needy around them. Gwendolyn undertook the visits to the sick, for Cicely's old reserve still clung about her; and although she knew and had faith in the good news she had once doubted, she lacked the power to give it expression, whilst Gwen-

dolyn, in the simplicity of her newly-found happiness, could speak of what was in her heart with the frankness of a child and with the earnestness of a woman. She, who had known so well what darkness and doubt were like, could gently lead those still struggling amid the shadows into the glory of the light, and teach, out of the fulness of her own experience, that God was everywhere, and that every act of every life could be consecrated to his service.

Lady Allardice approved the work the two girls had undertaken, and encouraged Gwendolyn to be Cicely's companion in all her expeditions.

"It does her good to have you with her, dear child; and it is so much better that one in her position should not go about quite alone. She never will have a servant with her, Cicely is so very independent; but it is a great relief to me to feel that she has you always beside her; I have such confidence in your judgment and discretion."

"I think Cicely is far stronger than I on these points," answered Gwendolyn smiling.

"I do not know. I am afraid Cicely is rather inclined to be romantic at times."

"Romantic!"

"Yes; it may be my fancy. It is one reason why I wanted you here. Perhaps I should hardly mention such a thing to you; but I am afraid she takes just a little too much interest in poor young Mr. Kennedy."

Gwendolyn coloured, and said nothing.

"It is quite natural, I daresay, for we were all fond of dear Reginald once, and hoped— But no doubt you know the story of our sweet Cynthia's girlish romance.

It was altogether a sad mistake, and we all felt it a good deal; and I cannot help fearing it has given Cicely a greater interest in the young man than is quite healthy or proper. He is kind and pleasant to her, and there cannot but be a certain intimacy engendered by that of past days; but on his side I am convinced it is nothing more. Cicely would never attract one who had ever loved Cynthia; and, besides, I have my reasons for believing that Reginald Kennedy's thoughts are turned in another direction."

Gwendolyn, who had seen a good deal of the young clergyman of late, was surprised at this. It had seemed to her pretty plain whither his thoughts were tending, and Lady Allardice was generally shrewd enough in her observations.

"You mean you think Mr. Kennedy is paying attention to somebody else?" she asked slowly, not manifesting any great interest in the topic, although she felt much.

"I hardly know whether it has come to that yet, but I think it soon will do," answered Lady Allardice with some significance.

Gwendolyn paused awhile in thought before she asked the next question.

"Do you mind telling me whom it is you suspect?"

"I am not sure if I ought."

"Ought?"

"Yes; I am not sure if it would be right to do so, under existing circumstances. I do not hesitate, however, to say this much, that if his choice has lighted

where I think it has, he has showed himself a wise man, and if he succeeds in his suit, he will win for himself the sweetest of wives, and one who seems to me just made for him."

Gwendolyn asked no more questions. She felt convinced, from her aunt's manner, that it was of her she spoke, and her thoughts flew back to the conversation she had held with Cicely upon the evening of her arrival three weeks ago.

"Poor Reginald!" said Lady Allardice, heaving a little sigh, "I hope he will not be disappointed a second time. It would be so sad for him. My darling Cynthia would never have made a clergyman's wife; but *this* one—ah, that would be a different matter! I do hope he will not be disappointed."

Lady Allardice saw that Gwendolyn understood her, and argued well from the silence which fell upon her. According to her theories, nothing so inclines a girl to feel an interest in a man as the idea that he admires her; and Reginald Kennedy certainly did admire Gwendolyn. If a mutual interest and admiration could be stirred up in those two natures, what would be more probable than that love should be the outcome? Who could be better fitted for each other than Reginald Kennedy and Gwendolyn Maltby? Lady Allardice was convinced that to bring about such a match would be to secure the happiness and well-being of two people in whom she felt an affectionate interest, and put an end at the same time to the danger which she saw hanging over Cicely.

"I am so glad you are helping Mr. Kennedy with these East End People's Concerts. I should not have been comfortable to have allowed Cicely to go alone; but with you there also, I can feel safe. You will keep an eye upon her, will you not, dearest Gwendolyn? You will try to restrain her, if you see her growing *too* deeply interested in Mr. Kennedy's plans; and you will tell me if you see anything more than is quite usual passing between them?"

Gwendolyn made no immediate answer, but by-and-by she said gently,—

"Dear Aunt Allardice, I am sure you need not be afraid of Cicely's doing anything she should not. I do not know any one more thoroughly to be trusted in everything."

Lady Allardice professed herself satisfied, and Gwendolyn was relieved that she changed the subject. The girl knew nothing definite about her cousin's affairs; but she felt perfectly convinced that Reginald Kennedy and Cicely loved each other, and had awakened to a consciousness of their love.

The young clergyman, who had worked for two full years amongst the poor at the East End, had, of course, become greatly interested in them, and no one had taken a greater pleasure or had worked harder than he in the scheme for adding to their few enjoyments and refinements by the establishment of Saturday evening concerts for working men and their wives. These concerts were designed to keep them from the public-houses, to provide them with an evening's amusement in which they



would hear nothing but what was free from all taint of sin, and to raise and elevate their moral nature. An evening spent in hearing songs and readings of a high-class character, sung and read by people socially far above them, but owning, by their very presence there, the holy tie of universal brotherhood which makes the whole world kin—such an evening could not fail to do good to the rough artisans who crowded to the concerts Saturday by Saturday. And not only were they raised and edified by all they heard, but they went to their homes with their untouched wages in their pockets; and their wives and children felt the benefit of the working-men's entertainment, even if not present themselves.

All this Kennedy explained to Cicely and Gwendolyn when soliciting their aid; and it was easy to see how great was the need of help to keep such a series of concerts going in different poor neighbourhoods, unless the rich and young and capable would give their money, or their energies, or their talents to the aid of the scheme. Both girls gladly gave their help on many occasions, and took real pleasure in the hearty enjoyment evinced by a crowded audience of working people in the simple ballads they sang to them.

Bertie Heron was one of the committee for organizing these meetings, and was always to be found at his post. He could sing or read with equal facility, and was an immense favourite among the people. Gwendolyn and he saw a great deal of each other in the "artistes' room" behind the scenes, and they seemed to entertain a mutual liking and admiration.

It was after one of these concerts, as the two girls were driving home together, that Cicely broke a long silence by saying,—

“Well, Gwendolyn, it is done.”

“Reginald—” began Gwendolyn, and then she paused. Cicely bent her head.

“Yes, Reginald.”

There was silence again; and Gwendolyn in the darkness possessed herself of Cicely’s hand and pressed it, to show a sympathy she hardly knew how to express.

“I am so glad, Cicely.”

“Yes, I know. I knew you would be glad.”

It was some while before any more words were spoken, and then Cicely said,—

“Mamma will not be glad.”

Gwendolyn feared not indeed. This was only two days since the conversation previously narrated.

“When shall you tell her?”

“To-night.”

“Shall I go up straight to my room when we get in?” asked Gwendolyn.

“No, not unless you wish. I would rather you were there, if you don’t mind.”

“I will do as you like. Must it be to-night, Cicely?”

“Yes; I don’t like putting anything off; besides, Reginald will be coming to-morrow. She had better have had time to get over the first shock.”

The drive was finished almost in silence. It was Cicely who appeared most calm and resolute as they descended and walked upstairs to the drawing-room.

Lady Allardice was alone there, not having been out that evening. Tea was brought in, and whilst she sipped hers she asked a few languid questions about the evening's entertainment.

"Mamma," said Cicely by-and-by, and Gwendolyn's heart began to beat rather fast, "the item of news which will interest you most in to-night's programme is that Reginald and I are engaged."

There was silence for a moment in the room. Gwendolyn glanced under her eyebrows from Lady Allardice's disturbed, startled face to Cicely's firm and steadfast one, and felt in a moment whose was the stronger. A light shone in Cicely's eyes that was not of defiance or disdain, but was born of a deep and settled happiness within the heart.

"Engaged—engaged to Reginald Kennedy!" gasped Lady Allardice. "Impossible!"

"Not impossible, mamma," answered Cicely quietly. "Can you not make up your mind to it? You were fond of Reginald once."

"Oh, this is absurd, this is ridiculous," cried Lady Allardice, trying to resume her customary air of authority. "I never heard of anything so childish and foolish in all my life. Really, Cicely, you had better go to bed and forget all such nonsense. Mr. Kennedy shall be written to and told it cannot be. You are a mere child. You shall not be allowed to sacrifice your prospects in life in such a way as this."

Lady Allardice tried to talk herself into confidence in her own powers. One or two early passing fancies

on the part of Cynthia and her admirers had been successfully treated after a similar manner; and there seemed a certain familiarity, a sense of triumph to come, in ordering the girl to bed, and saying that a letter would put a stop to all that childish nonsense.

Whilst uttering the words, Lady Allardice experienced a hope that she might still obtain a victory; but it was not a hope destined to live long.

Cicely sat still, quiet and unmoved, until her mother had finished this tirade, and then she said quietly,—

“I am not a child, mamma, neither in mind nor in age, and you cannot treat me as one. I am going to marry Reginald because we love each other, and I hope you will not oppose us. You cannot stop it, so do not try. You have made Cynthia a countess. Is not that enough? Can you not let me marry where I love?”

Lady Allardice was silenced for a moment. Then she wiped her eyes and sighed heavily.

“You were always so self-willed, Cicely. I never could do anything with you. I only hope Reginald will not have good cause to regret his choice.”

Cicely smiled without any indignation.

“I think he knows me as well as any one does.”

“Not so well as your mother.”

“I am not at all sure of that.”

“And why have you been deceiving me all this time? Why was I not told? I saw you were bent on marrying him, but I never saw anything on his side. I hope you have not made yourself too cheap, Cicely. It will be fatal to your future happiness if you have.”

"I do not think you need be afraid there," answered Cicely, her colour rising slightly. "And for a woman who prides herself upon good taste, I call that remark hardly in character."

Lady Allardice could not deny the accusation.

"Everybody's taste seems to have left them to-night," she answered with a little shudder. "Fancy taking such an opportunity as that—such a time and place—a hall full of dirty people—"

"A swimming-bath," corrected Cicely gravely—"an empty swimming-bath filled with dirty people, and people shut up in the dressing-boxes, too. What then?"

"Just fancy a daughter of mine being proposed to in a swimming-bath," moaned Lady Allardice. "Why, it doesn't seem decent. I call it dreadful from first to last. I shall tell Reginald so when I see him. I shall tell him I wash my hands of the whole thing. I am a miserable woman. Nothing ever comes right for me. Cynthia, who does make a good marriage, does nothing but coop herself up in the wilds of the sea-coast and upbraid me for my share in her life; and now Cicely, whom I looked to for comfort in my old age, turns from me to a penniless curate who—" and here Lady Allardice fairly gave way and sobbed aloud.

Cicely looked at Gwendolyn, hardly knowing what to think. Habitual distrust of her mother struggled for mastery with filial compassion. Was Lady Allardice playing a part, or was she really distressed?

"Go away a little while," whispered Gwendolyn; "leave her to me, please."

Cicely obeyed, and Gwendolyn crossed the room and knelt at the weeping woman's side.

"Dear Aunt Allardice, don't cry. Why should you mind? Reginald is so good; and Cicely will make him a splendid wife. You know how very clever he is. When he is a dean or a bishop, or has written a book which everybody is talking about, you will be so proud of him. I am quite, quite sure you will be glad by-and-by."

Lady Allardice slowly dried her eyes, but still shook her head mournfully.

"You don't understand, child. Reginald is not the kind of man to rise. He has no worldly ambition. He is of the stuff that makes saints and martyrs, but not deans or bishops. And Cicely is growing to be very much noticed. She is original and handsome and clever. I had set my heart on her making a good match. It is a sad thing to be a mother."

"No, no, dear Aunt Allardice, you don't think so, I am sure; and you will think so still less if you will give Cicely and Reginald your blessing, and show what a good mother you are."

"You don't understand, child," began Lady Allardice, but Gwendolyn would have her say out.

"Yes, but I do. I understand much better than you think. I know it is nice to have daughters rich and important; but don't you think it is nicer still to have them happy and useful? Cynthia married Lord Tremain. It was just what you wanted; but has it made you happy since?"

"That unlucky touch of paralysis spoiled it all," began Lady Allardice.

"No, indeed, aunt; his illness drew them more closely together than if he had kept his health. If Cynthia had come to town and gone in for a ceaseless round of gaiety here, would you have been much happier with her, do you think?"

"What are you driving at, child?" asked Lady Allardice almost fretfully.

"Can't you see, dear aunt? I want you to let Cicely marry the man she loves without any opposition, which you know will not turn Cicely from her purpose, but will only imbitter her against you; as—O Aunt Allardice, do think what a miserable place the world would be if nobody married for love. Please do try to like Reginald. He will be a good son to you, indeed he will, and he will make Cicely a better daughter than ever she has been before. If you only will give them your blessing and make them happy, you will be so happy yourself afterwards—I know you will. Please tell me that I may go to Cicely and say that you will receive Reginald as a son, when he comes to-morrow."

Eloquently as Gwendolyn had pleaded, she had hardly looked for so rapid a victory, and could scarcely believe her ears when her aunt, after sighing deeply and wiping her eyes many times, said in a brisker tone,—

"Go and send Cicely to me. I will tell her so myself."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A MORNING RIDE.

THE next day proved more propitious for Reginald Kennedy's visit than anybody could have foreseen.

The morning's post had brought the news that a little son had been born at Tremain, and Lady Allardice's delight at being grandmother to a little viscount was so great that she would have been gracious and beaming to her worst enemy, much more to a man she was able both to like and respect, and one whom she had promised to receive and welcome as a son-in-law.

Gwendolyn rode out alone that day in a happy frame of mind. The birth of Cynthia's little boy would, she felt assured, bring with it much happiness to his mother's heart, and give a new and beautiful meaning to a life which had seemed to its owner a poor, empty, hollow existence. Whilst as for Cicely, her happiness would certainly be secure, so long as she was permitted to follow the dictates of her own heart, and link her life with such a man as Reginald Kennedy had proved himself. Gwendolyn was sincerely happy, with the generous happiness of one who can rejoice with them that do rejoice.



Bertie Heron joined her in her ride, as he frequently did when she chanced to be alone, and to him she communicated the intelligence that he was richer by "a sort of a cousin" more, in the person of little Lord Ettrick. He heard the news with pleasure and satisfaction.

"I must call and congratulate Lady Allardice," he remarked. "How pleased she will be! By-the-by, how are things going on there?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, about Kennedy. I saw some understanding had been arrived at last night. Do you think she will oppose them very much?"

"No, she is going to accept their decision. Cicely will have no battles to fight on that score."

Bertie's face brightened.

"I am glad of that. I was afraid a real quarrel might be the result. Cicely is not like Cynthia. She cannot temporize, or even be politic. I always think she has less patience with her mother than with any one else."

"I am afraid so. You see Lady Allardice has not been always quite—quite sincere in talking to them; and they found it out, and I am sure it did harm."

"As it always does. But Lady Allardice is a kind-hearted woman at the bottom; I have always said that. She has been a good friend to me."

"And to me," answered Gwendolyn eagerly, generously forgetting the episode following upon her loss of fortune and broken engagement.

"If anything would make Lady Allardice a happy woman, it would be such a son-in-law as Kennedy will

make her, if she will only allow herself to like and respect him as he deserves."

"I think so, indeed," assented Gwendolyn. "I do not know Mr. Kennedy very well myself, but I have always admired him from what I have heard."

"He is a splendid fellow!" answered Bertie with enthusiasm. "He has been my best friend for years, so I ought to know."

"Cynthia once told me that what first struck her about him was his earnestness. I have often thought of it since. He always seems to me to be so very much in earnest."

"He is. Once I was inclined to regret it. The earnestness of his love for Cynthia half killed him when the engagement was broken off. He was not really cured, I believe, until he saw her at Tremain, and was convinced that she was not unhappy, and that she was making a devoted and most unselfish wife to her most adoring of husbands. Those weeks at Tremain did him great good; and he had always been fond of Cicely and interested in her. In some ways those two sisters are very much alike, more so underneath than appears on the surface, as no doubt you know. I think of the two I am fonder of Cynthia, but I believe Cicely will make the best wife for Kennedy. Of the two, I believe she is the more easily influenced, although one would hardly think it on the face of things."

"I know what you mean," answered Gwendolyn. "I think you are right."

It seemed quite natural to her to be talking in this

strain to Bertie Heron. She had seen so very much of him during the past year that she felt on more intimate terms with him than with her cousin Bernard, who was so often kept out of her way. It seemed a very natural thing to discuss everything that happened with Bertie. A bond of sympathy and mutual comprehension had from the first drawn them together.

As they were riding along in the rather empty Row a pair of riders advanced from the opposite direction—a lady and a gentleman engrossed in earnest conversation, and Gwendolyn recognized in the latter none other than Sir Kenrick Dalrymple.

She started slightly, and a thrill seemed to run through her. She had not seen him since that black-letter day the previous summer, when he had parted from her in anger and disappointment, and left her, as she then believed, hopeless and heart-broken.

The thrill was not caused by any sense of pain or of passionate regret. Gwendolyn was strangely conscious that moment—conscious with a sensation of great surprise—that not only was her heart not broken, but that she could feel honestly and unfeignedly glad that the melancholy, darkly handsome man before her was not her affianced husband.

The next moment their eyes met, and a sudden flush rose in Sir Kenrick's face.

Gwendolyn's colour had not changed one whit. She was calm and composed, and bowed slightly as they passed each other, wondering why he looked so confused and shame-faced.

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Bertie Heron glanced anxiously at her as he observed the mutual recognition. She met his glance and returned it smilingly.

"Have you quarrelled with Sir Kenrick, Bertie? You did not acknowledge him till I did."

"I don't see much of him now."

"Why not?"

"I was disgusted with him, and gave him a piece of my mind. He isn't the sort of man that forgets or forgives. We do not have much to say to each other now."

"Who is the lady with him?" asked Gwendolyn.  
"She is very well mounted."

"Do you really wish to know?"

Gwendolyn looked at him in surprise.

"Of course I do now. What is the mystery? Do you know who she is?"

"Yes; she is his wife."

"His wife! I did not know he was married," said Gwendolyn with some interest and animation, but not one spark of wounded vanity or self-pitying pain in either face or voice. "I hope he will be happy, I am sure. When was he married?"

"In the October of last year," answered Bertie dryly.  
"He had known the lady exactly five weeks."

Gwendolyn was silent, taking it all in. Of what she was most conscious, and not unpleasantly conscious, was the indignation of her companion.

"Why did you not tell me before?" she asked with a look of amusement.

"I did not care to publish his disgrace," answered Bertie, with rather a lofty lifting of his head.

"Disgrace! Bertie, I am afraid you are uncharitable to Sir Kenrick. Why do you call his marriage a disgrace?"

"It is a disgrace in my opinion when a man deliberately sells himself for money, without one spark of love."

"How do you know he did not love her? You must not judge harshly, Bertie."

"He *could* not love her," answered Bertie stoutly. "He had known her only five weeks, and it was only three months before that he was engaged to *you*."

Gwendolyn could not but smile at the implied homage of these words. She was surprised to find how quietly and calmly she could discuss such a matter as this.

"And he had the impudence to ask me to be his best-man," went on Bertie with rising indignation. "I spoke my mind on that occasion with a freedom he is not likely to forget."

"I think you are rather hard on poor Sir Kenrick," remarked Gwendolyn.

"I do not wish to be hard upon him," answered Bertie more quietly, "but really some things do strike one as rather too much. You see I was fond of Kenrick once, and believed in him. It overturns one's ideas when a man falls as he has done."

"Remember," said Gwendolyn gently, "that his ambition is not all a selfish one. Pride in his house and name, and a desire to restore his family fortunes, are not quite to be despised. You must not be too hard upon him."

"Well," said Bertie, "if you can excuse him, I suppose I ought; but to think that once he loved you—and he certainly did for a time—and then went and married an heiress who is not even a lady! One can't get over it!"

"Not a lady!" echoed Gwendolyn, surprised and almost shocked, for Sir Kenrick Dalrymple had seemed to be a man of refined tastes.

"No, not even a lady. She is the only child of a rich Manchester cotton-spinner, and has an enormous fortune. All she wanted was a name and a title; and when Kenrick made sure of her money, and she of his descent, they mutually rushed into matrimony, with a haste which seemed to show mutual fear of the slip 'twixt cup and lip. He no doubt remembered the trick which an heiress played him once before. She may have had fears on her part that he might repent the bargain he had made. Anyway, both seemed agreed to hasten on the marriage with all possible speed. In five weeks' time from their first introduction Miss Robson became Lady Dalrymple. They are as rich a couple as one meets in a day's march now. I hope they are also as happy."

"I am afraid you do not," answered Gwendolyn with a grave smile.

"Yes I do; but I know it cannot be. It is impossible for happiness to exist without love."

Gwendolyn was lost in thoughtful meditation. A scene rose before her which had passed between her and the man she had once loved, in which he had expounded to her his views upon more than one subject.

"Love was his religion," she said to herself. "He tried to persuade me to make it mine—earthly love such as he had to offer me. What will he do now? He has married without love. He has lost his religion. What will he put in its place? Oh, I am very glad that I lost my fortune in time to test his love and his religion. Suppose I had only found out its true nature afterwards!"

Gwendolyn's face was so grave that her companion said deprecatingly,—

"I'm afraid I ought not to have said so much to you; I'm afraid I have distressed you."

She turned towards him a face which seemed to contradict any such idea.

"No indeed. I feel sorry for Sir Kenrick if he has made a mistake in his life, but that is all."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. I should not speak anything but the literal truth on such a subject, Bertie, not even from outraged pride or love or anything else. I would keep silence, but I would not play with truth."

"You mean you have no regrets on your own account?"

"No, none."

"I am glad—more glad than I can say."

Gwendolyn smiled half sadly as she said,—

"Does it not sound very fickle?"

"No," he answered with energy. "I don't believe in love without respect and reverence, and all those feelings which make it a high and a holy thing. When truth and honour and plighted word are all flung to the wind because self-interest is touched, how can love remain?"

It must be killed. *You* at least could never love where you could not reverence too."

Again came that intonation of reverential homage which told how very high the speaker held his companion to be above himself. It touched Gwendolyn, who had always looked up with much respect to the honest integrity and steadfast consistency of character which she had remarked from the first in Bertie Heron. He had always been a man to reverence and honour, she had thought, despite his youthful looks and the apparent aimlessness of his life. At every turn she had heard of the good he was doing in many quiet, unsuspected ways. He had seemed to her peculiarly unworldly; she had looked upon him almost as a type of what a man situated as he was ought to be; and here was he seeming to look up to her with unbounded admiration.

The ride was finished almost in silence; and Bertie accompanied her to the door, and alighted to offer his congratulations to Lady Allardice, whilst Gwendolyn went in search of Cicely.

Cicely was found in her own room, her face somewhat pale, but serene and composed.

"Well?" questioned Gwendolyn.

"It is all right," answered Cicely, drawing a long breath. "All right, thanks to you."

"To me?"

"Yes. I am convinced, as I was all along, that your influence carried the day. Mamma was very good to Reginald, very good to us both. She did not let him see at all that she did not quite like it. I think she



was pleased and touched afterwards by his manner towards her."

"Yes. I am sure she would like us to be fonder of her than we are."

"I think so too. I did not believe it once, but I do now. When Reginald had gone, she told me that since you have been here, doing things for her, and treating her more as a friend, she has begun to wish that she had taught her own children to do the same. She almost admitted that she knew it was a good deal her own doing; but she said you had persuaded her not to oppose my marriage with Reginald, and that she had come to the conclusion that I knew best what was for my own happiness, and that perhaps she had no right to interfere with it. It was better, she said at last, to win her children's love and confidence, than to plan and make brilliant marriages for them. Gwendolyn, I have often heard mamma say things like that before, but this time there was that *something* in her manner which told me she was in earnest. I shall try to be a more dutiful daughter than I have been before, and I know Reginald will help me."

A happier sort of understanding now existed in Lady Allardice's household. Reginald Kennedy's influence, quiet though it was, was not exercised in vain upon any one of its members. Cicely was much softened by the deep love which had silently grown up within her for many long weeks and months, and which now blossomed out into beauty, and bore promise of much fruit before the great day of the gathering in should

come—the fruit of a life consecrated to the service of God.

Gwendolyn greatly rejoiced in Cicely's happiness, and in the growing pleasure and satisfaction Lady Allardice took in Reginald Kennedy's visits and in Cicely's ready companionship. But she was not destined to remain very long a spectator of this increase of domestic happiness, for about three weeks after Cicely's engagement a letter came from Cynthia :—

“DEAREST GWENDOLYN,—I am going to be selfish and ask you to bury yourself again at Tremain. I am well again now, and want a companion badly; and I want you to be godmother to my boy, who is to be christened next week. Please say you will come, and come soon. Cicely will be able to spare you now that she has Reginald; and I want you very much indeed, if only to talk to you about the boy. I know Tremain will be the death of him if I do not have your powerful assistance in restraining his ardour. I believe he expects him to walk and talk in a week or so, and already suggests that a little roast-beef would not hurt him! Don't be afraid to come. You shan't be ‘baby-persecuted;’ but do come, because I want you so much. Mamma thought Ettrick a splendid child, as she would tell you. I'm glad I asked her down to look at him; she was so pleased. Write and say you will come in three days.

“CYNTHIA.”

So Gwendolyn wrote obediently that she would go in three days, and she did.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### CYNTHIA'S CHILD.

WHEN the moment for departure came, Gwendolyn was conscious that she was sorry to leave London; yet she was unable to trace this sorrow to any particular source.

She was fond of Cicely, it is true, and was growing somewhat more fond of her aunt; but then Cynthia was many degrees dearer to her than either of these two relatives, and the little, unseen viscount, who was to be her godson, had already won his way to a foremost place in her affections.

Thus it was that Gwendolyn could not quite understand her feeling of reluctance to leave her aunt's house, and was half amused, half puzzled by the haunting sense of regret which oppressed her.

This, however, yielded to the pleasures of anticipation as she neared her destination; and by the time that the train drew up at the small station some ten miles from Tremain, the regret had passed away, and she was all eagerness and impatience to see Cynthia and her little boy.

It was a lovely day, late on in April,—a day that was

like June for warmth and balmy sweetness. Cynthia herself sat in the luxurious open carriage that awaited Gwendolyn, and very loving was the greeting exchanged by the cousins.

Cynthia looked fragile and delicate, Gwendolyn thought, not so well or so bright as she had hoped to find her; but that look might probably pass away when she had regained her full measure of health and strength.

"Ought you to have driven so far, Cynthia?"

"Oh yes; I am allowed to drive as much as I like. This lovely spring weather would make any one well. It is my first spring spent altogether in the country, if you will believe me, Gwendolyn."

"You must enjoy it."

"Yes; it is an improvement on the perpetual whirl of town. I do not feel as though anything would induce me to go back there this season."

"Do you think you are quite well, Cynthia?" asked Gwendolyn with solicitude.

"Oh yes," was the half-careless, half-indifferent answer. "We do not get stronger as we get older, you know, Gwendolyn. Apart from advancing years, I am well enough."

Gwendolyn smiled.

"I think you have hardly got to the stage yet, Cynthia, to plead advancing years."

"Have I not? Sometimes I could fancy I had lived a century at least."

"Sometimes I have felt like that," said Gwendolyn seriously; but Cynthia only laughed.

"You! Why, you are a child still."

"Only a year younger than you, Cynthia."

"A year! Say a lifetime."

"No; a year and four months."

"Half a lifetime at least," repeated Cynthia. "You must be as conscious of that as I am."

"I know you seem older; but why?" asked Gwendolyn, looking inquiringly into the thin, wasted face of her companion.

"I have lived—and loved," answered Cynthia quietly. "You have your life still before you."

"I have loved too," said Gwendolyn softly and sadly.

"No, you have not," returned Lady Tremain with a quiet firmness which made Gwendolyn turn towards her with wide-open eyes.

"Not loved!"

"No. You believed that you loved Sir Kenrick Dalrymple, but you did not. Real love does not die in six weeks' time as yours did—not even though its death-blow has been struck by the discovery of unworthiness in its object. You went through a phase with which many of us are familiar; but you have never loved as yet."

Gwendolyn was silent for a while, and by-and-by Cynthia asked,—

"You're not offended, Gwendolyn?"

"Oh no; I was thinking."

"Yes, and the more you think the more you will be convinced that I speak the truth. It took me—shallow, cold-hearted me—two years to get over my first real

love. Think of that, and compare your nature with mine. How long would it take you to regain that tranquil serenity which is your most enviable of attributes?"

"I don't think my nature is any better than yours, Cynthia," said Gwendolyn slowly. "But all the same I think you may perhaps be right, though you are the only person I would allow to say it."

"I and Bertie Heron," concluded Cynthia in the same languid, matter-of-fact way.

Gwendolyn's cheek flushed quickly.

"Why do you say that? How do you know—"

"I don't know anything, except that Bertie always will say just what he thinks to every one; and I know what he thinks about Sir Kenrick. It is a bad habit of his, for which I am always reproving him."

There was a silence after this, and then Gwendolyn seemed to wake up with a start to ask,—

"And the boy?"

"Oh, he is well. I avoid mentioning him when possible, as I know you will get sick to death of his very name before you have been a week in the house. I tell Tremain that people will really think he has already sunk into his dotage, if he does not amend his ways. He is always to be found in the nursery now, when not in my room."

In spite of the indifference of Cynthia's words, there was a softened look upon her face and a light in her eye which showed that she was less weary of the subject than she seemed.

"What are you going to call him?"

"Harold, after his father. Tremain has been trying hard to find a masculine version of my name, but has quite failed. So we are reduced to Harold."

"I like Harold," observed Gwendolyn. "I am so glad you have got a little boy to love, Cynthia."

Cynthia slightly shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose he will grow up to be a sad plague to his mother. If he is anything like me he will. It is to be hoped he will take after Tremain."

"When is he to be christened?"

"Next week. General Alexander and Bertie Heron are to be godfathers. I expect Bertie on Monday."

"Is Bertie coming?" asked Gwendolyn with some animation. "I am glad."

"Yes; I thought I should like him to be godfather to Ettrick better than any one I know, and you godmother. I shall expect you and Bertie to look after his morals. You know that is not much in my line. You like Bertie, don't you, Gwendolyn?"

"Very much," she answered, and a sudden, unexpected wave of colour swept over her face. Gwendolyn wondered if Cynthia had seen it.

They reached Tremain, and very natural and home-like did the girl find the stately place to be. Her old room had been prepared for her, and she found it almost difficult to realize that she had ever been away.

An early visit was paid to the nursery, and the bonny little boy duly admired and caressed. As he lay upon his mother's lap, stretching his small limbs and indulging

in infantile cooing suggestive of placid contentment, Gwendolyn could not but say,—

“How proud you must be of him, Cynthia!”

They were alone with the baby in his nursery, the nurse having been dismissed for a short time, so there was no restraint over the speakers, who sat on opposite sides of the fire in the great, cool room, both watching the antics of the little viscount, who lay half undressed upon his mother's knee.

“Proud!” repeated Cynthia, half sadly, half indifferently. “Pride goes before a fall, does it not?”

“I think you may be allowed a little pride in your boy without any such gloomy prognostications,” answered Gwendolyn. “I am proud of him at any rate, my little godson.”

She knelt beside her cousin on the floor, and bent over the little boy, who clawed at her smiling face with ten tiny yet vigorous fingers.

“The little thing!” she said caressingly. “Isn't he sweet, Cynthia?”

“I'm afraid I am not a baby worshipper,” answered the mother, looking down at her son with eyes that somewhat belied her words.

“Let me take him,” said Gwendolyn. “He is such a darling. See, he isn't a bit afraid.—You *are* a little sweet!”

Cynthia watched whilst Gwendolyn nursed and crooned to the child with the motherly instinct of delight so natural to a woman. It was a pretty sight, and Lady Tremain seemed to think so.



"I think you are better looking than ever, Gwendolyn," she remarked. "It is becoming to you that expression of rapturous admiration."

Gwendolyn laughed, but was far more interested in the baby than in herself.

"He is going to be like you, Cynthia; I know he is. I never knew before that babies could be like grown-up people; but I am sure he is like you. His eyes are just like yours, when he opens them wide and stares. I wonder if things look the same to him as to us. He is such a little darling!"

"I'm afraid you are going to be as hopelessly inane over him as Tremain," remarked Cynthia. "I had hoped for more sense in you, Gwendolyn."

"I am so glad he is like you," continued Gwendolyn unheeding.

"So am not I."

"Why not?"

Cynthia sighed, and looked sad and thoughtful.

"I should be sorry to think that any child of mine would grow up like his mother."

"But why?"

"Need you ask? Has mine been a happy or satisfactory life? Is my character one you would like to see reproduced in another generation?"

"Cynthia, you are always hard upon yourself. You think yourself worse than you are. I always thought so, and now I am sure of it."

Cynthia shook her head with quiet decision.

"You do not know," she said, "nobody knows the

darkness of my own heart. I am not fit to have the training of a young child's mind."

"Cynthia!"

"No, I am not. When that boy grows to be a child, and wants to know all kinds of things that little children should be taught, what can I say? How can I teach him to believe, when my own faith is a cold, dead thing, unworthy the name?"

"I wish you would not speak so."

"I am only speaking the truth. Children should be taught that religion is a happy thing, full of hope and comfort, a guide to our path and a light to our eyes. How can I teach that, when to me all is darkness and confusion?"

Gwendolyn looked distressed.

"Why is it always so to you, Cynthia? Before I knew what Christ's love was like, it was dark to me; but not when I came to understand his love for us. When he came, all was light. You know all that was strange to me. How is it that the light does not come?"

"I cannot tell. I think my heart is dead. When people talk to me about religion, I seem to know exactly what they will say before they open their lips. It all sounds plausible enough, even beautiful; but there is nothing in it to bring happiness to me. I believe what they believe. I am not troubled by atheistic doubt. I believe that God made the world, that Christ redeemed it, and that the Holy Spirit sanctifies it; but to me there is no sense of personal satisfaction in this belief. I believe in a future life—I almost wish I did not, an-

nihilation would be such peace—and I trust that such beliefs as I hold, and such endeavours as I make to do my duty here, may win for me a certain share of happiness in the world to come. Yet I can feel no joyful anticipation in such a state of being.”

Gwendolyn looked up at her cousin, and then down again at the now drowsy infant.

“It is not doing our duty here that gives us happiness afterwards.”

“No. I know the formula: faith in Christ’s blood wins us heaven. As I say, I do believe; yet I certainly hold that it is a first duty to conduct ourselves as we should do here.”

“Don’t call it a ‘formula,’ Cynthia. If you only knew what it was like for any one like me (who had never been taught as other girls are) to find out that the price had been paid and salvation already won for us—to understand that we had not to work it out for ourselves, which one felt could never, never be done. I do not think you ever can have realized what such a knowledge is like, coming upon some one who has been struggling to find out what he must *do* to be saved. When we really understand that the work has been done for us by Christ, no love or gratitude or happiness seems enough to express what we feel. Don’t you understand what I mean? I never can half say what I want.”

“Perhaps we had better not let Ettrick have any teaching at all,” said Cynthia slowly. “It seems to have answered admirably in your case. Shall we try it in his?”

"Don't, Cynthia!"

"What's the matter?"

"It seems as if you were making a sort of jest of something so important."

"It is no jest; it is solemn earnest. I know human nature, and I know the world. I want my boy to have more strength to avoid temptation than his mother has had. I am wondering how he is to get the necessary instruction."

"Cynthia," said Gwendolyn gravely, "I think if you pray earnestly and constantly for help and for light, it will come in time. I once thought prayer was something of a 'formula,' but now I know differently."

"I do pray," answered Cynthia quietly. "I have been praying now for some while. Reginald taught me some faith in that, although it has sometimes been rudely shaken; but the answer has not come yet."

"It will come," answered Gwendolyn, with the assurance of an earnest faith. "I am sure of it."

There was silence for a while, and then Cynthia, with a sort of yearning look at her child infinitely pathetic, said quietly,—

"If anything happens to me, you will care for the boy, will you not, Gwendolyn? You will teach him to love his mother's memory?"

Gwendolyn looked up with startled eyes.

"What do you mean, Cynthia?"

"I mean," answered Cynthia composedly, "that I have a premonition sometimes that I shall not live very long. Tremain's life, as you know, is uncertain. I think my

death would be his death-blow. If our little boy is left an orphan, I want you to promise to take care of him. I know you will be a mother to him—a better one, without doubt, than I should be. Will you undertake the trust? I want to make you and Bertie Heron joint-guardians—he to manage the estate, you to have the charge of the child. If—” Here Cynthia paused, looked into Gwendolyn’s earnest face, and left her sentence unfinished. “People may be surprised at my choice; but I know what I am doing, and Tremain will let me settle all. Will you take my boy, Gwendolyn?”

Tears stood in Gwendolyn’s eyes; she bent her head over the child and kissed him passionately. It was a minute or two before she could command her voice.

“You know I will, Cynthia, you know I will; but why, why—”

She could not finish; but Cynthia knew her meaning.

“I think so, because I have grown so steadily more weak and thin and languid for many months now. I thought when the child was born I should be better; but I am not. I have just the same old sensations of failing health and strength as I had before, and I know that other people have noticed it, and are anxious about me. Aunt Magdalene I know is very uneasy. You see it is rather in our family for people to go off in a sort of unexpected way at about my age. Your mother did for one, and an elder brother of our mothers. Aunt Magdalene lost her only child like that, only much younger; and I can see she thinks badly of me. She has been

very good to me these last weeks, Gwendolyn. I have almost lost my old inclination to shock her."

Cynthia spoke so quietly of her fears as to her health, that it was hard to realize she meant approaching death.

"Perhaps it will be best so," she continued dreamily. "I might make him but a bad mother. From you he will learn nothing but good, and he will love the mother he may never remember. That is better than seeing him turn round and reproach me."

"Don't, Cynthia!"

"Are you crying, Gwendolyn? Don't cry; you know after all it may be only my own fancy. People don't always die because they think they are going to. But I cannot help making plans now that I have got a child to think for. If you will take him, I shall be quite happy about his future."

"I must take him," answered Gwendolyn, clasping the unconscious child closely in her arms. Then she came and laid him in his mother's lap, still holding him upon her arm.

"I will ask Bertie when he comes, and then Tremain shall make out the necessary instructions. Poor Tremain! he must not suspect why I want it done. He will think it is only right and proper to draw up a Regency Bill for any one so important as Ettrick."

The mother looked down at her child, and caressed his soft, downy head with one white hand.

"Poor little boy!" she said softly, "will you have to grow up without father or mother? Ah well! you will be blessedly unconscious of your loss. Happy baby, not

to know what sorrow is! Perhaps the best thing that could happen to you would be to grow up an orphan; but I should have liked to hear you, just once, call me 'Mother!'

Gwendolyn rose quickly to her feet, but already two warm tears had fallen upon the baby's face. She could not control them any longer, and hastened from the room, leaving Cynthia and her child together.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A BETROTHAL.

A WEEK had passed away since Gwendolyn had reached Tremain. Little Lord Ettrick had been christened with all the simple pomp due to the heir of Tremain; and Gwendolyn and Bertie Heron had taken upon themselves, with much serious consideration of their responsibilities, the guidance of their little godson's spiritual well-being, as well as the guardianship of his small person and large property, should such a relationship become necessary.

A week had passed away.

Cynthia was again in her nursery, alone with her child, as the evening light slanted in golden beams across the floor, making the little one laugh and stretch his tiny hands towards the bright bars, as he lay upon his mother's lap in placid contentment.

Cynthia's face was sad and grave and wistful as she looked sometimes down at the child, sometimes across towards the shining sea, which lay below the window near which she sat. Her face was very thin and wasted, and the faint spot of red in each cheek only



seemed to throw into relief the absolute colourlessness of the rest of the face.

Cynthia alone and unwatched looked terribly fragile and ill; but so far this delicacy of appearance had produced little anxiety or remark, being attributed to the birth of her child. And when in company, by her readiness of speech and languid animation, she contrived to appear far less changed than was really the case.

As she sat alone in her nursery, the change was very visible; but when the door opened slowly and admitted a familiar figure, a sweet and sudden smile flashed over her face, seeming to rob it of much of its wan sadness.

"Well, Gwendolyn, come to worship at the shrine?" and the mother looked down at the baby-boy with a smile and a sigh.

Gwendolyn came and knelt beside Cynthia, and rested her forehead against her shoulder.

"I have something to tell you, Cynthia."

"I know," answered Cynthia quietly; "Bertie—"

Gwendolyn lifted her sweet, flushed face and gazed into her cousin's eyes with a tremulous smile hovering about her lips.

"My Golden Gwendolyn," said Cynthia very tenderly, as she bent to kiss her. "I wish you all the happiness you both deserve."

Gwendolyn's face was bent now over the baby's tiny one. It seemed as if she had not many words; but words were not needed to express the pure, unutterable joy which filled her whole soul.

"You are a pair of foolish, romantic children, and I

don't know what my mother would say to you," said Cynthia after a pause. "How you are to live will be a problem difficult of solution; but such happiness as you will enjoy together is worth some risk. You were just made for each other, as I saw from the first, though I did not expect this."

Gwendolyn raised her head at last, and the deep joy and love that seemed to shine out from her dark eyes touched a chord in Cynthia's nature, and her rare tears sprang to her eyes.

"Some marriages are made in heaven," she said, and kissed Gwendolyn again.

Gwendolyn looked up into the face turned tenderly towards her, and said simply,—

"I think yours was, Cynthia."

Cynthia looked out over the sparkling sea, a far away wistful look stealing into her eyes. Presently she said in a dreamy way,—

"Perhaps it will be consummated there before so very long."

Silence reigned after these words. Deep joy and deep sorrow are so closely blended, love and death are so closely akin, in this complex world of ours, that no revulsion of feeling was caused by such words or thoughts. In the hour of her supremest, holiest happiness, Gwendolyn felt it no shock to be confronted by thoughts of parting and of death. Rather it seemed to her as if such thoughts were in a manner inseparable from the deep joy which had filled her whole nature.

Cynthia was the first to speak, the first to feel that

no shadow should be needlessly cast over the light of love's first happiness.

"I am so glad, Gwendolyn," she said, smiling in her more natural way. "I knew it was coming, and I felt sure of the end; but there is nothing like certainty after all. I am very much pleased."

"How did you know?" asked Gwendolyn. "I did not think any one could have known."

"I was afraid I almost let out my suspicion to you that first evening, when I spoke to you about the joint-guardianship."

Gwendolyn's eyes opened wide.

"Why, Cynthia, that was a week ago. Such a thing had never even entered my head. There was nothing to know then."

Cynthia smiled with an air of infinitely superior wisdom and experience.

"My dear child, do you mean to tell me that your love for Bertie Heron is the mere mushroom growth of a night—that you have learned to love him since last Monday?"

Gwendolyn was silent, the rosy colour mounting slowly in her face. She did not answer at once, but played a little with the baby's dimpled hands, as they clutched eagerly at her fingers and her shining gold chain. Presently she looked up, and said simply,—

"I suppose you are right, Cynthia—you generally are; but I did not know it myself."

"That is quite possible. Fortunately for yourself, Gwendolyn, you are not given to a perpetual, morbid

self-analysis as to your feelings and sentiments. You might travel a long way upon an untried path without being aware that you had reached an unknown country. That discovery no doubt took you by surprise."

"I think it did," answered Gwendolyn with a grave sweet frankness. "But I think you are right, Cynthia; I must have been fond of Bertie for a long while. From the very first I always liked him."

"We all like Bertie Heron," smiled Cynthia. "I told you so long ago. 'Universal confidant' I used to tell him he was. It always comes natural to confide in Bertie. He is so perfectly honourable, high-minded, and high-principled. I don't think anybody could go very far wrong with Bertie looking on. I always thought I behaved better when he was in town."

Gwendolyn smiled. She liked to hear his praises sung.

"I am so glad," continued Cynthia softly. "Do you know that I have been in Bertie's confidence this past eight months?"

"No. Have you?"

"Yes. I found him out in September, when he was here, and charged him with it. Bertie of course told the truth, which very few men in his shoes would have done. I gave him what encouragement I dared, and have been quietly awaiting the result. Your letters from London gave me much satisfaction, and I had my own ideas as to results when I asked you and Bertie to Tremain for the christening."

It was pleasant to Gwendolyn to hear all this.

Cynthia had a way of making her little stories far more interesting by manner and gesture than the mere recital of words indicates. She gathered from this little history that Bertie had been a constant, chivalrous, devoted lover far longer than she had supposed.

There was a footstep outside and a low knock at the door. Cynthia lifted her head and smiled meaningly as she said,—

“Come in.”

Gwendolyn did not need to turn her head to know who it was that entered.

“Why, Bertie!” exclaimed Cynthia, “who would have dreamed of seeing you here?—Ettrick, I shall have you spoiled before you are two months old by all this notice.”

“I was told I should find you and Gwendolyn here,” said Bertie, laying his hand gently upon the golden head of his promised wife. “Wish me joy, Cynthia.”

“I do,” answered Cynthia quietly; “all the joy you both deserve.”

Gwendolyn rose and stood beside Bertie; and both looked with a deep and almost melancholy feeling of love upon the young mother and her child.

Cynthia looked up suddenly and said,—

“You will be father and mother to him now. It was always in my thoughts. I had hoped it would be so, for his sake and for mine, as well as for your own.”

Gwendolyn, for answer, took the boy in her arms and held it up for Bertie to kiss. That simple action

was an answer in itself. The joint charge was accepted in the spirit in which it was given.

The nurse came back to her baby; and the three, who had still much to say to one another, strolled down to the terrace below.

"You know I am not sure that I have any right to encourage you in your romantic ideas," said Cynthia with some seriousness. "How do you propose to live?"

Bertie looked just a little grave; but Gwendolyn smiled bravely.

"We have eight hundred a year between us," she said. "Surely that is enough for the modest wants of two people; and when Wylmington is let we have more a good deal."

Eight hundred or a thousand a year seemed to Gwendolyn an ample income, considering that all they wanted was each other. Cynthia, however, shook her head with serious gravity. To the young countess, with her princely income, it seemed almost like beggary.

"Tremain has influence; he shall get you something, Bertie. You have neither of you been used to poverty. I should not like it for you."

Gwendolyn looked half perplexed, half distressed.

"I shall begin to wish I had not lost my money if you both look so grave. I never felt it so very much before."

"Don't say that, Gwendolyn," said Bertie, taking her hand and placing it within his arm. "If you were an heiress I could not stand in the relation to you which I now occupy."

"Do you mean," asked Gwendolyn half reproachfully, "that you would have let my money stand between us?"

He smiled with a certain meaning in his glance which made Gwendolyn's eyes fall before his. Both knew of what each was thinking. Had she still been an heiress, she would in all probability have been by this time Lady Dalrymple.

Cynthia took up the word.

"Of course so long as you were rich you were far more likely to fall a prey to a fortune-hunter than to get a husband like Bertie. It is all very well to say that money is dross, but it is not the received opinion of the world. Your fortune would have made a great gulf between you and Bertie had you not chanced to lose it."

Gwendolyn pressed the arm on which her hand rested.

"How glad I am that I lost it," she said softly.

Cynthia perceived that this was not the time to enter upon any practical discussion as to the future. She was anxious for something to be done for these two, and had a nervous, restless feeling that her time for making plans might be short; but it was useless to press a point when the time was not ripe. To have each other was all that seemed of any importance just now to Gwendolyn Maltby and Bertie Heron. He had no anxieties on his own account, she would permit him none on hers; all they wanted now was uninterrupted leisure to be with each other. That at least Cynthia could

secure them. She left them pacing the terrace, and went to find her husband.

"Tremain," she said, standing over him and caressing his gray head, "Gwendolyn and Bertie are engaged."

"Are they, my love? Well, I hope they will be very happy."

"So do I. I think they will; but they will be very poor."

"Dear, dear. Can we not help them? We have plenty to spare."

Cynthia smiled.

"We cannot bestow an income upon them exactly; but I think we might find Bertie something to do. He has brains, and knows how to use them, and would be very valuable in many capacities, although he has never exactly gone in for any one thing."

"We must see what we can do," said Lord Tremain reflectively.

"Yes; we sober old married people must do what we can for the young ones. We were lovers once, you know, Tremain."

"Once!" he repeated, turning his weather-beaten face up towards hers with a look of infinite tenderness. "Once and always, Cynthia."

"Once and always," she repeated with a peculiar earnestness, which he heard and rejoiced at, without comprehending its hidden meaning.

She stooped and kissed him, and spoke with a curious mingling of gravity and playfulness.

"You see we have played out our drama, and now



we can stand upon one side and watch the life around us. It is very restful—is it not?—to feel that we have got each other, and our child, and can just rest and wait—”

Cynthia paused, afraid lest she had said too much ; but one word had struck upon Lord Tremain’s ear with a sense of satisfaction.

“Our child,” he said with a smile. “I have hardly seen him all day. Let us go up and see him in bed—shall we?”

“O Tremain,” said Cynthia, smiling and shaking her head, “where is your sense of truth? You spent your whole morning with baby, when you ought to have been seeing to business.”

The father smiled with conscious pride.

“He is such a little fellow,” he remarked, as if that were answer sufficient. “When he grows a big chap he won’t be so amusing.”

A sudden choking sensation stopped Cynthia’s answer ere it reached her lips. When the boy was grown a “big chap,” where would his mother be? If his mother should be spared to him, where would the father be? Would they ever stand together watching him bounding and leaping upon the terrace walk, or running races with the faithful hound beside her in the wooded park? A strange, wild yearning over her husband and her boy rose up in Cynthia’s heart. Must she leave them—the one in his helpless infancy, the other in his feeble old age? Had the languid indifference to life which had grown up so long within her, really

sapped the vitality out of her very heart's core? Could the wish for life restore her any of the energy she felt to have so utterly lost? A sudden revulsion of feeling swept over her as she slowly ascended the oak staircase, and she clung tenaciously to her husband's arm.

"We steady old married folks do not get younger," he remarked smilingly, looking down upon her, and pausing at the top of the flight. "My dearest love, you look pale and tired to-day."

"I have been a little excited by Gwendolyn's story," she answered, smiling bravely. "I am not very strong yet, you know."

He smiled. He was easily pacified by any words of hers.

"We sober old married people have not lost our sympathies yet," he answered, repeating the phrase as he heard it from her lips. "So you feel very steady and matronly now, do you, Cynthia? quite ready to take your place 'on the shelf,' as they say, and watch the game going on around?"

"So long as you and I are 'on the shelf' together, Tremain," she answered, "that is all I care for. Now, let us go and see the child."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE OLD HOME.

"You do not wonder that I do not like to sell it, Bertie," said Gwendolyn, turning at the end of the drive and looking back lovingly towards the gray, weather-beaten house. "My dear old home!"

Gwendolyn and Bertie were at Wylmington. They had come down, in the absence of the tenants, to look at the place together, less on account of any necessity to do so than by their mutual wish to be as much as possible alone together. Gwendolyn, too, had a great wish to take her affianced husband to Wylmington; and they were now pacing the park together in the sweet May sunshine, unconsciously drinking in the sweetness and beauty of everything around them, whilst they were absorbed by each other.

"My dear old home!" repeated Gwendolyn tenderly. "I do so love it, Bertie!"

"I am sure you must do. Ah, Gwendolyn, if you had not elected to marry a poor man, you might have lived there again."

Gwendolyn turned to him with a sweet smile.

"As if I would not rather live with you in a cottage than enjoy all the luxuries of life at Wylmington without you. Ah, Bertie, what a wonderful thing love is! How is it that it changes the whole of one's life, and makes the dulllest and most uneventful future look so bright? I suppose people would say our lives promised to be very blank and tame. To us they will just be happiness itself."

"Yes, what is love?" responded Bertie, falling into her train of thought. "I suppose no one will ever be able to give an answer to that question; but its power is stronger than that of any other in the whole world. Faith and hope both fade before the light of perfect love. I suppose that God, who is Love, makes love what it is."

"Yes; and love makes our happiness here and hereafter."

After a thoughtful pause Bertie continued,—

"When I was a lad I remember being troubled, as we all are from time to time, by the thought of eternity. It seemed to me that there *must* be a certain blank and awful dreariness in any state of existence which was to have no end, no limit. I said something of this to my mother, and she smiled in her quiet way, and said,— 'When you are a few years older, my son, and have learned, as you cannot learn even from a mother, what a deep and life-long love is like—when you have loved and been loved—you will then feel how wonderful a power for happiness has come into your life, and will to a certain extent feel how impossible it is for weariness to

exist in the presence of a deep love. And then, when you picture, if you can do so, a love far more pure and holy and true and deep than can be possible to our sinful natures, a love not only for those whom we have loved on earth and who are now united to us for ever, but for the great and loving Father who has taken us home, pardoned and redeemed by the blood of his Son—if you can picture to yourself such a state as that, such love and such peace, such a glorious fulfilment of our utmost desires, you will understand then, I think, how even eternity can never seem too long.’

“I have often thought over her words, often tried to realize their meaning, and sometimes I have thought that I have done so; but I have never understood them fully till now.”

Gwendolyn bent her head and walked beside him in silence. Her heart was filled with a deep sense of happiness which needed no words for its expression.

She told her affianced husband, as they walked together beneath the tender green of the young foliage, many incidents of her past life, as recollections came crowding upon her.

She told of that letter her father had written, and which she had received only when he lay cold and dead, and she was an orphan and alone in the world.

She told him of the awful sense of blank desolation that had settled down upon her then, and her despair of ever reaching a truer sense of light and happiness or of understanding life’s problems and mysteries.

She told him of her struggles, her doubts, her hopes,

her fears. She told of her first-found happiness and its sad collapse, and of her last steady journey from darkness to light. She told him all, keeping nothing back, and told it with an increasing sense of joy that he should know it all.

It was very sweet to Bertie to be thus let in behind the scenes of Gwendolyn's past life. He had loved her very deeply and tenderly for a long while, but his very love had made him afraid of intruding too roughly upon the sacred sorrow of her past life. Now he was free to hear all; and he listened with intense interest to the history of her inward life, her struggles and disappointments, and then the steady dawning of that light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

They walked back together in a softened, thoughtful way, many tender feelings and memories flitting through their minds.

- "My old home!" said Gwendolyn again. "You would not like us to part with it, would you, Bertie?"

"Indeed, no. Gwendolyn, my darling, it shall be my highest ambition, in the work I hope to find, to be able at some future day to bring you back to your old home, that we may end our days there together."

Gwendolyn's face lighted with a happy smile.

"That would be like a beautiful dream," she said, "to live there with you, Bertie; to settle down in the old home when we are growing old, and see the same things as I used to see when I was a child, take the same walks, and perhaps think sometimes the same thoughts. I have often felt sorry that I did not live a life at

Wylmington such as I should like now to do. If ever we go there again, we can do better together than ever I could alone."

"It shall be our little dream, our little ambition, my sweet love," said Bertie earnestly. "To work for you at all will make toil sweet. To have an object such as this will give an added sense of sweetness. When we are ever inclined to grow weary in the strife and rush of life, we will think of Wylmington and the rest we hope to take there by-and-by."

"I think it will be rest enough for us to work side by side," said Gwendolyn with a smile that spoke more than the words. "But I shall like to think that you may live some day at Wylmington, Bertie, in the dear old home that never could be a home again to me without you."

The short visit was soon over. Old haunts had been revisited, old associations revived. Gwendolyn had shown her favourite spots to Bertie, had made known to him her old home; and when this work was done, the train whirled them back once more to Tremain.

"I wanted to show it you myself," said Gwendolyn as she leaned back in her corner in the gathering twilight, "because if you go and stay with the Salisburys, as they want you to, you would have seen it alone."

"I'm not sure that I shall go to the Salisburys after all," said Bertie. "I don't know that I should care for the place without you."

"Oh yes, you would. I should like you to go," said

Gwendolyn. "I should like to think that you were living there, if only as a guest, for a while. Yes, Bertie, you must go."

"Of course if you wish it I will."

So that little matter was settled, such a small one as it seemed then—only a few days' visit to Wylmington. Little did the two who planned it so calmly imagine what would be the results.

Gwendolyn had spent the previous night at her aunt's house in London, as the journey to Wylmington and back could not be made in a day. Lady Allardice had been full of compassion for the foolish romantic children, who had so madly elected to marry upon nothing, and settle down to a humdrum life with only a small income and a large amount of love to depend upon for their happiness in life.

Gwendolyn was not a child; she understood the position better than most people supposed. She was not fond of limited means, small rooms, and all the petty trials incident to people in their position. But then she had learned in addition the bitter lesson that wealth can do sadly little to ease an aching heart or bring happiness to a troubled spirit. Some of Gwendolyn's darkest hours had been spent amid all the luxuries that wealth can bestow; all her most happy ones had been since she knew herself to be a poor woman. In face of facts like these, she could not give to wealth that pre-eminence of importance claimed for it; least of all could she do so in her aunt's house, where every glance recalled memories of the unhappy lives of two girls brought up in the lap



of luxury. Nay, was Lady Allardice herself a happy woman? Had she ever tasted that deep sense of satisfaction and rest which a great love brings with it? Gwendolyn could not answer this question, but she was unable to believe that such had been the case.

At Tremain a different atmosphere reigned — the atmosphere of love and harmony. Worldly prospects were not ignored, but they were allowed to take the secondary place which is their due; and all sympathy and consideration were lavished by Lord and Lady Tremain upon the two “young things” who had in their house exchanged vows of love and devotion.

The day following, Gwendolyn rode over to see her aunt Mrs. Knollys.

Mrs. Knollys had been somewhat unwell, and had been unable to drive to Tremain since the christening; but Cynthia had driven over during Gwendolyn's brief absence and had told her the news, so that the girl was received by her aunt with peculiar tenderness when she appeared in the cool, shady parlour she so well remembered upon her first visit.

There was a great deal to say upon both sides. Gwendolyn had always felt when with her Aunt Magdalene that she was with one who had

“A heart at leisure from itself  
To soothe and sympathize,”

and never had this gentle unselfishness been more apparent than to-day.

The future is always attractive to the young. The

building of fancy castles begins from the days of childhood ; but still more of charm has the careful mapping out of life for those who seem to hold the thread of the maze in their own hands, and are able to see a little way before them into the dim future. Plans must be made, and it is a happy task to the young to make them.

Gwendolyn had no secrets from her aunt. She talked to her freely and frankly of all that was in her head, and in time came the description of the visit to Wilmington and the day-dream in which she and Bertie had indulged, of making it their home at last if it were possible.

"Well, dear child," said Mrs. Knollys caressingly, yet with a certain earnest gravity mingled with her tenderness, "I think you may make up your mind as to the possibility of that."

Gwendolyn lifted her sweet face, with a questioning look upon it, towards her aunt.

"Yes, dear," continued Mrs. Knollys. "I do not see why you should not know it now, as well as later. After you lost your fortune, I made you my heir. I am not a rich woman as some people's ideas go ; but I have a very comfortable income, and this house is my own, and a little land too. At my death all will be yours. I think it will enable you to live at Wilmington."

Gwendolyn sat silent. It was not easy to know how to answer such a speech as that, so many conflicting feelings were aroused, so many strange sensations were at work within her.

Mrs. Knollys seemed to divine her confusion.

"We will not talk about it, dearest, if the subject is painful to you, but I think it is best that you should know the truth."

"Dear Aunt Magdalene, you are so good; but I cannot bear to think of anything—like that—anything coming to us in that way."

Mrs. Knollys smiled serenely.

"I shall not die any the sooner for having made a will, nor yet for having made known its context to you," said she. "You are my nearest and dearest, Gwendolyn. You and your cousins are all I have to think for; and they are well provided for, every one of them. I would rather, far rather that what I have to leave should go to you and yours. I always have hoped to hold a child of yours in my arms before I die."

Gwendolyn's face was hidden upon her aunt's bosom.

"Dear Aunt Magdalene, do not talk about dying. It grieves me so."

"Does it, dearest? I do not wish to grieve you. I will say no more; but, Gwendolyn, my sweet one, do you think that death to me can be a very sad or terrible thing?"

Gwendolyn looked up into the quiet, earnest face, and a thrill ran through her. It seemed at that moment as if her aunt were moving in a different world from this, and spoke out of a deeper, wider experience than mortals generally attain.

"You are not unhappy, are you, Aunt Magdalene?" she asked wistfully.

"No, Gwendolyn. I am very happy. I am, I think I may say, always happy."

"But then—why—"

Gwendolyn did not finish the sentence; but her meaning was plain.

"Dearest," said Mrs. Knollys gently, "can any happiness we enjoy here be anything but a foretaste of far, far deeper joys to come?"

Gwendolyn was silent.

"So can it be thought very strange in one whose ties here are so much loosened, as mine are, by the hand of the great deliverer men call Death, that the great mysterious summons should be welcomed with gladness rather than regarded with fear? No, Gwendolyn, I am waiting in patience and submission; but I shall not be sorry to go, and you who know this must not sorrow for me."

Gwendolyn could not speak, but she kissed her aunt, and went away full of new and tender thoughts.

"How differently things turn out from what we anticipate," she mused. "We shall not always be poor; we may be able before our old age to live at Wylmington. And yet I cannot feel glad at the knowledge, and I almost wish I had not known."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A SHADOW ON TREMAIN.

THREE weeks had passed away, three weeks of almost unalloyed happiness to Gwendolyn, when she was roused from her dream of peaceful security by the necessity to face a great sorrow.

With the first of the summer heat, Cynthia failed suddenly and utterly. She had not appeared to change for the worse during the spring months, which are generally thought so trying. Gwendolyn had begun to have hopes that her premonitions were groundless, and that she would gradually recover the measure of health and strength which she had lost, and that the melancholy fears she had expressed about herself would prove themselves groundless.

Nobody had seemed to notice very much Cynthia's wasted look. Her delicate health was put down to the birth of the child; and it was only just beginning to dawn upon people that something more than that must be wrong, when the news came upon them with startling suddenness that Lady Tremain was seriously ill.

Low fever was what the doctors called it, rather for

want of a better name, it seemed, than for any specific character of its own. It seemed more like a sudden failure of vital power, a sudden collapse of strength, an utter prostration of mind and body rendered much more serious by an intermittent, hectic fever, which drained away the patient's powers to a very alarming extent.

The greatest consternation prevailed at Tremain when the young countess was suddenly stricken down. Lord Tremain could do nothing but sit at the bedside, gazing at his young wife with a mournful face of uncomprehending woe that was infinitely pathetic. He did not realize her danger, but was as much lost without her as a little child would be. He and the faithful hound watched untiringly at the bedside; and Gwendolyn and Bertie Heron had to do all the thinking.

Even to each other they would not name the great fear which was seldom absent from their minds. So far the doctors had breathed no hint of any danger, though their grave faces plainly spoke of a somewhat serious anxiety.

Gwendolyn sent at once for Mrs. Knollys, and upon the second day she arrived, prepared to remain a guest at Tremain so long as her presence there could be a help or a comfort.

Cynthia had smiled, as if well pleased, when she saw her aunt standing beside her bed, shortly after her arrival. Both doctors had agreed that one very favourable symptom in their patient's condition was the perfect calmness of her mind and the tranquillity with

which she accepted every suggestion and every arrangement for her comfort.

"Aunt Magdalene," she said in the very low voice which weakness had left her, "you will stay here, will you not, and take care of Tremain?"

"Yes, Cynthia. I have come prepared to stay as long as I am wanted."

"Thank you. Will you take Tremain out for a little while? He has been here since yesterday morning. It cannot be good for him."

Lord Tremain, hearing his name, came forward slowly, and asked anxiously how Cynthia felt.

"Better," she answered with a smile that almost brought tears to Gwendolyn's eyes. "I want you to take Aunt Magdalene a drive. I shall have a nap, I daresay, whilst you are gone. Take the dog with you too, if you can get him to go."

Cynthia's will was law to her husband. He went slowly away, and the reluctant hound was induced with some difficulty to accompany him. Mrs. Knollys followed.

"Gwendolyn," said Cynthia, when they were alone together, "Tremain must not know."

Gwendolyn made no answer, but her eyes seemed to ask a question.

"I mean," continued Cynthia, "he must not know that I am likely to die."

"The doctors have not said that yet, Cynthia."

"No, not yet. When they do, he must not be told. Let it come upon him gradually, imperceptibly almost,

as it will do if he just sits there and watches me. I think it will not be so much of a shock then. He will not be long after me, I know."

A long silence reigned after this, and then Cynthia said,—

"You will remember what I have asked?"

And Gwendolyn answered,—

"I will."

"I should like to see the boy," said Cynthia next; and Gwendolyn fetched from the nursery the sleeping infant, and laid him beside his mother in the bed.

"I am so glad it is nothing that can hurt him," she said. "I like to look at him sometimes; and the doctor said I might without any fear. He is a bonny boy, is he not, Gwendolyn? Poor little Ettrick! I am glad he will not suffer."

Gwendolyn sat down beside the bed and looked at her cousin, so wasted and white, and at the rosy, healthy babe beside her.

"Cynthia," she said, "I must write to Aunt Allardice to-day. I did not yesterday. I had so much to think of."

"Yes," said Cynthia; "you were very good. I knew all would be right in your hands. It was a great comfort. Yes; you must write to mamma. Tell her there is no immediate danger; but that if she would like to come she will be very welcome, and Cicely too. They must make such arrangements as best suit them. Cicely is to be married in July, is she not?"

"Yes; so she told me when I saw her a few weeks ago."



"It must not be put off. I shall tell her so when I see her. I think I shall have Reginald to see me too. Sick people are privileged. I think Mr. Carlingford will spare him for that."

Cynthia's eyes were growing bright. The spot of colour was deepening in each cheek. Fever was evidently coming on, and Gwendolyn administered a cooling draught, with an entreaty that she would not excite herself.

Cynthia smiled.

"My dear child, I am not excited. It is not talking that brings fever in my case. Talking to you is a relief, because I feel that I can say what is in my mind without tiring myself by thinking if it is safe. See, the child is awaking. Will you take him? He is always happy with you, and I like to see you with him."

Gwendolyn obeyed, and Cynthia lay silent some while, watching the little one's evident satisfaction with himself and his surroundings.

"He will be very fond of you," she said presently. "Children always like the feel of strong arms. I am afraid mine never gave any great satisfaction in that way."

Gwendolyn made no reply. It was far harder to speak of the child now than it had been when Cynthia first gave her the charge. She was afraid of breaking down and giving outward signs of agitation. She felt as if she had never before loved her cousin so well as now.

"Cicely will see him," said Cynthia presently; "but I do not think she will love him as you do."

"She could not love him better," answered Gwendolyn unsteadily, pressing her lips to the baby's soft cheek to conceal the tears that had started to her eyes. "My little godson!"

"I am glad you stood for him. It gives you an extra claim. I wonder what my mother will say about it."

Gwendolyn looked up. This aspect of the case had not struck her before.

"You think she would want him if—if—"

"If he were left an orphan," concluded Cynthia quietly. "Yes, I expect she would consider her claim to be the first."

"Perhaps it is," said Gwendolyn. But Cynthia shook her head.

"I could not give Ettrick to mamma," she said quietly. "I shall have to tell her so when she comes. I do not think she would expect it."

There was a long pause after this, and then Cynthia added slowly,—

"I think when a profession of religion cloaks so very much that is alien to it, it is the most fatal way of choking what is good in one's nature. I used to think that I should have been a better woman if I had lived amongst people a little less orthodox than our religious circle. I could not bear to think that Ettrick should see and hear what I have."

Gwendolyn looked thoughtfully out of the window; and said by-and-by,—

"I know what you mean. I sometimes felt the same; but I think the fault is as much ours as that of the people whom we condemn."

"I daresay. I am always ready to distrust myself; but explain."

"I suppose we are both thinking more of your mother than of anybody else—as a type of the people you mean?"

"Well, mamma was certainly a pronounced type," returned Cynthia, with a tinge of bitterness in her tone; "or else we saw behind the scenes better with her than where others were concerned."

"I know what you are thinking of. We all thought—I mean we fancied she was insincere and self-interested. Sometimes I have fancied since, that she was acting more sincerely than we thought."

"Yes?"

"Reginald told Cicely that she was hard upon Aunt Allardice. Every one has his failings; but all were not to be unhesitatingly condemned because of that. He said that he believed she had a real devotion to her children, and believed she was doing a mother's first duty by them in trying to map out their future according to her own ideas of happiness."

Gwendolyn's meaning was clearer than her construction. Cynthia understood, and smiled whilst she sighed.

"I suppose mamma was brought up in a hard school herself. Habit is second nature."

"Yes," answered Gwendolyn eagerly. "That is what

Reginald said. What seems so contradictory and insincere to us is not so in her mind. She has always had a different way of thinking; but it is not for us to condemn. We cannot read other people's hearts. We cannot see how much of good is mixed up with what looks like evil. I have been thinking a great deal about that lately. Mr. Carlingford said something like it too, that we should never be in haste to condemn, because no one but God could see how much that looks trivial and meaningless to us, may not be done in a right spirit and therefore be acceptable to him."

Cynthia was silent, but a softened look came over her face.

"Go on," she said by-and-by, "tell me some more. I need all the comfort I can get. Has there been any meaning in my idle, trivial life?"

"I am sure there has," answered Gwendolyn earnestly. "Yes, Cynthia, you have done a very great deal for me. You have been fond of condemning yourself; but I do not think there is any one in the world, except Bertie, to whom I owe so much. And then think of your husband—"

"Whom I married for his wealth and position," put in Cynthia quietly.

"I do not believe you did that," returned Gwendolyn. "You may not have loved him when you promised, as I love Bertie; but you were not selfish. I know, and you know, that it was as much for his sake as for your own that you married him. And think what you have been to him since."

"And he to me," added Cynthia softly and sadly. "Poor Tremain!"

"Cynthia," went on Gwendolyn, with increasing earnestness, "God is very good. He is not a hard judge of us, as we are of one another. He has never condemned us half so much as we have condemned ourselves. All he wants is our love and our confidence. He wants us to be his faithful soldiers and servants wherever we are and in whatever we do. He does not lay down hard and fast lines, and say in this or that way, and no other, is he to be served. He says that all we do may be done to his glory. Cynthia, you say that your life has been wasted. Indeed, indeed, I do not think it has. I feel sure you have lived nearer to God than you even know yourself."

A sad and yet a sweet smile flickered over Cynthia's wan face.

"You are very comforting, Gwendolyn. You must teach my boy as you are teaching me. Then he will not despair, as his mother did before him."

"You do not despair now, Cynthia?" asked Gwendolyn tenderly.

"Not exactly—that word is somewhat too strong—but I seem to have lost all power of hope."

"You need not lose it, Cynthia. God is with you now, and will be to the end. You need not doubt, and you need not fear."

Cynthia shook her head slowly.

"I have not been a faithful soldier and servant. He will remember that, or I shall, and his face will be turned away."

"Never!"

Again came the gentle smile, more expressive than any words could be.

"You do not understand, Gwendolyn; I am glad you do not. You could hope all things, and believe all things; it is your nature. Mine is different. To those that have is given, and from those that have not is taken away what they had."

"What do you mean, Cynthia? Indeed, indeed I do not think you know what you are saying."

"Do I not? Ah well, perhaps I do not—or else I know all too well."

"What do you know?"

"That the darkness will never lighten for me, but close me in more and more, until— Ah, Gwendolyn, what will the awakening be?"

And gently Gwendolyn answered,—

"Ah, Cynthia, what?" and then she quoted in soft, clear tones,—

".....No type of earth can image that awaking  
Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of seraphs round him breaking,  
Or felt the new immortal throb of soul from body parted;  
He felt those eyes alone, and knew 'My Saviour, not deserted.'"

There was silence then in the sick-room, and Cynthia lay with eyes closed weariedly upon the troubled world which had brought so many hard problems into her life. But no look of calm and sweet repose stole over her pale face. The same look of quiet, passive resignation was still stamped there, a resignation not born of hope, but rather of patient hopelessness.

Gwendolyn watched her wistfully, and by-and-by Cynthia seemed to divine it, for her eyes opened, and she said with a faint smile,—

“You must not be sad on my account, Gwendolyn; I am not in the hopeless state some are. I do believe in God's eternal mercy. I have enough of faith in Christ's redeeming grace to believe that he will save my soul at last; only I cannot grasp that mysterious hold upon unseen things which makes all darkness light, all obscurity clear. The valley of the shadow will be very dark for me. I shall have to walk alone and fearful through its dreadful mysteries; but I pray, and you must pray, that I may never lose hold of the faith I still cling to, that I will find light upon the farther side.”

“I shall pray for more than that,” answered Gwendolyn quietly; “I shall pray that the light may shine right through the valley, and reach you upon this shore. And, Cynthia, whether you see your Guide or not, I know we none of us ever tread that valley alone.”

Cynthia made no reply. She merely smiled, and as she had already talked as much as her feeble strength permitted, she was content to remain silent until her husband returned. Then she roused up to tell him that she was better, and to draw his attention to the child, who was at once handed over to him.

Gwendolyn wrote her letter to Lady Allardice, and then went to tell her Aunt Magdalene of the trouble which lay so heavy upon her in regard to Cynthia.

“Ah, my child, I know only too well what that is

like. I suppose there are few who have seen it and suffered from it more than I have done."

"You, Aunt Magdalene!"

"Yes, Gwendolyn. I have had a troubled life, as I think I have told you. Some of my troubles I shrink from recalling even now, and the worst one of all was that terrible religious depression, that sense of being shut out from the presence of God, from which my husband suffered for many years before his death."

"I did not know," said Gwendolyn softly.

"No; few people know it, few knew it even at the time; but I can hardly now look back upon those years without a shudder. All peace, all joy, all hope seemed gone for ever. I believe it was only my love for him and his for me which kept the balance of his mind from being altogether unhinged. Gwendolyn, I loved him more than life itself. He was my all, for our one precious child had faded away, as Cynthia seems fading now. I loved him—ah, how I loved him! And it was my fate for many years to see him suffer, as I pray to God I may never see another human creature suffer, from the fixed and unalterable conviction that his soul was lost for ever; that death would plunge him into everlasting misery, and sunder him for ever from me—the one being he loved."

"Poor Aunt Magdalene!" said Gwendolyn. "Oh how dreadful, how very dreadful!"

"My child, may you never know the truth of your own words. Dreadful! Ah, my God, thou alone knowest the awful mystery of such a trial! Gwen-



dolyn, there were moments, nay, days and weeks, when the dark cloud seemed to rest upon me also ; when my faith all but gave way ; when I too have almost said in hopeless bitterness of anguish, ' My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ' And yet I stand here at last, having fought out that battle, more bitter than death, to say, with the unalterable conviction of a soul upon whom God's hand has been heavily laid, that he is a sure refuge in time of trouble, that he has robbed the grave of victory and taken the sting from death. My child, never lose hold of your faith in God, for that is your only anchor, your only defence, your only hope in this world and the next."

" Aunt Magdalene," said Gwendolyn, much moved, " how did it end ? "

" In peace at the last. Calm after the storm—light at evening time."

Sudden tears sprang to Gwendolyn's eyes, more from her aunt's tone than the words she spoke.

" And Cynthia ? " she half whispered.

" We must pray that it may be so with Cynthia."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### CYNTHIA AND HER MOTHER.

A WEEK had passed away, a week of sadly conflicting hopes and fears, where those who tried to hope felt how little ground they had under them, and those who feared knew too well what good cause they had for their worst apprehensions.

Sir Frederic and Lady Allardice and Cicely were all at Tremain. Bernard was in America, where he had been for three months past, and was quite unconscious of his sister's danger. As he was so bad a correspondent, he could not even be informed of the fact, for nobody knew where he was.

In all that saddened household Lord Tremain alone remained unconscious of the danger which threatened his young wife. She was ill, he knew, very ill, and he was deeply distressed and unwilling to quit her bedside night or day, save that she wished him to do so, and her will was law to him. But that Cynthia should die was an idea he utterly failed to grasp—she, so young, so beautiful, so bright—it was sacrilege even to think of her and death together.

Cynthia was always conscious of this when he was near, and was not yet so utterly powerless but that she could smile at him, caress his hand with her pale lips, and murmur loving and encouraging words. It was her love towards him and towards her child that alone seemed to bind her to life. When neither was present she would sink into a trance-like state of torpor, which seemed at any time as if it might be merged in death.

If Lord Tremain, in his great love and his weakened mental power, managed to blind himself to Cynthia's true state, nobody else in that household did so. Gwendolyn and Cicely, Mrs. Knollys and Lady Allardice, all went about with saddened faces and heavy hearts. They knew only too well that the doctors held out but small hopes of any rallying of vital power; and this was made the harder to bear by the knowledge that there was nothing in the fever itself to destroy life—that it was the patient's condition, physical and mental, which caused the case to assume such a serious aspect. Great and prolonged depression of mind, one of the physicians opined, had reacted upon the body and caused a serious diminution of vital energy. Had it not been for this element in the question, the life of the patient would not be in any danger.

Lady Allardice heard this verdict with a sinking heart. She knew, none better, how and why it was that her daughter had suffered this long depression of mind, which had produced such unlooked-for results. Might it not have been better to have left her unfettered to follow the dictates of her own heart, and to

make a marriage which would have resulted in no accession of worldly grandeur, rather than have made her a countess only to see her pine away and die before a year had passed over her head?

These thoughts were stirring in Lady Allardice's mind one night as she sat by Cynthia's bedside, looking tearfully at the wan, wasted face upon the pillow, and pondering remorsefully upon the past, which she would now so willingly have undone.

Of Cynthia's slowly-awakened love for her husband she knew nothing. Her perceptions were not keen, and she only knew that Cynthia was a dutiful and a good wife. It had not yet dawned upon her that in the case of Lord and Lady Tremain love had begotten love, and that all the bitterness had been driven from her heart.

The room was very quiet. Lady Allardice was the only watcher, for Cynthia seemed to be sleeping. Presently she became aware that the patient was not asleep, but was looking earnestly at her out of a pair of dark, hollow eyes, which had grown unnaturally large and bright since her illness.

"Are you awake, dearest?" said Lady Allardice. "You had better go to sleep again if you can."

"I have not been asleep," answered Cynthia in her weak tones, but very calmly. "I have been thinking. Are we alone, mamma?"

"Yes, dear child."

"Then I should like to talk with you about a few things."

Lady Allardice felt nervous and miserable.

"My dearest child, you ought to rest. You will excite yourself if you talk."

"No, I shall not. I think nothing could excite me now. I shall have plenty of time to rest by-and-by."

Lady Allardice put her handkerchief to her eyes. She felt uncomfortable on her own account and on Cynthia's, and was half inclined to summon some one else.

"Mother," said Cynthia, with an unusual tenderness, "do not cry. Come and sit down beside me, for I want to talk with you."

"Yes, my darling," said Lady Allardice with a genuine sob of feeling.

"You know that I am likely to die?"

Lady Allardice sobbed again.

"The doctors do not quite give up hope yet."

"No? Well, we will not dwell on possibilities. We know that in all probability I shall not get over this illness. I have been prepared some while for it, and I have made plans accordingly."

Lady Allardice listened in silence, wondering what would come next.

"I do not think Tremain will live very long if I die," said Cynthia presently. "And then our little boy will be left an orphan."

"He shall not want for love," cried Lady Allardice, with a sudden burst of genuine feeling. "I will love him like my own. O my child! my child! why must I lose you? You have always been my first care, Cynthia. Oh, it is hard, hard, hard, that this should be the end."

Cynthia looked earnestly and wistfully into the face above her. Many new thoughts were rising within her.

"Mother," she said, "I do not want to distress you. If I had been a better daughter, perhaps matters might have been different; but as it is—forgive me if I pain you—I cannot, no, I *cannot* leave my child to your care. I felt I must tell you so myself, rather than leave you to find it out later."

Lady Allardice, who had never so far considered the matter of the child's guardianship, controlled herself and sat silent, taking in the sense of what was meant.

"Do you mean that you and your husband have appointed guardians for Ettrick?"

"Yes."

After a short silence Lady Allardice asked,—

"Who are they? I do not know much of your husband's relatives."

"No, he has very few, and those distant ones. We have appointed Gwendolyn and Bertie."

Lady Allardice sat very still. Visions rose before her of what the guardianship of a little earl would have been to her—how great a source of pleasure, how great an additional importance. She and her husband had many years of life still before them, in all probability: why should not they have been made the child's guardians? Surely such an arrangement would be the most natural. It was with some bitterness of spirit that she said by-and-by,—

"So your mother is to be passed over for Gwendolyn. Is Gwendolyn so much more fit to have the charge of a

young child than one who has been a wife and a mother for above a quarter of a century?"

Cynthia's dark eyes were fixed intently upon her mother's face.

"Mother," she said sadly and earnestly, "look back with me on my childhood. Do you think I should like it repeated in my boy's?"

"I am sure I do not know what you have to complain of," sobbed Lady Allardice.

"I do not complain, mother; I cannot bear even to seem to reproach you. I am a mother myself, and can feel how a child's reproaches must hurt; but I cannot, I cannot give my boy to you to train. I want him more than anything in the world to grow up with a simple, manly nature, with a trust in God and a love of his word and commandment, with a firm determination to speak the truth, to stand by his colours and never tamper with evil, and above all to have in himself that happy confidence in a heavenly Father's love which none of us has ever been able to attain. Mother, could you teach him that? I know that Gwendolyn and Bertie could; but could you? If you have it yourself, why have you never taught it to us?"

Cynthia's eyes expressed a strange pathetic hopelessness which struck Lady Allardice with dismay akin to fear. To her pleasant, shallow, easy-going mind, the awful realities of life and death and the future state had never presented themselves with any force. She had been content to drift idly with the tide, content with religious platitudes and outward forms, holding

tenaciously to them as to everything else which she deemed respectable and desirable, but utterly careless of the deeper, holier meanings which lay beneath ; ignorant of the blessings which a fuller knowledge and a child-like trust must bring ; looking upon all real and intense earnestness as a species of "eccentricity" which was to be rather avoided than courted, as being peculiar or out of the way.

But now, in this solemn hour of watching, in the dead of night, by a dying bed, with Cynthia's sad eyes fastened so earnestly, reproachfully, yet lovingly upon her, the scales seemed suddenly to fall from Lady Allardice's eyes, and she saw her life from a perfectly new standpoint. She no longer tried to hide the truth by a well-turned sentence or a specious argument. She no longer tried to draw her mantle of self-deception more closely around her, and defy the light of truth to penetrate. No. Nature triumphed at last over habit, and she wept bitter yet healing tears of real repentance.

"Cynthia, my child, you are right and I am wrong. I am not fit—I never have been fit for the care of children. I have lived only for the world. I was brought up to believe that rank and wealth were all-important, and I never cared for anything else. I was 'religious' because it came in my way to be so, not because I felt as—as—as others do—as we ought to do—as I pray God I may do in the future. I let you grow up with no better teaching than I could give you, because it seemed enough to me ; and I could not understand why you both, Cicely especially, seemed so restless



and discontented. I believe, Cynthia, I did not *want* you to grow up to have different ideas from myself. I felt (how shall I express it?) that if you took after some good people, I should find you unmanageable and difficult to deal with. I was glad to see you clear of Reginald's influence, feeling that it did not tend the same way as mine. Ah, Cynthia! Cynthia! I have been a miserable, self-deceived, self-deceiving woman. Is it too late now to change? I see things now as I never saw them before. Can I change now? Ah, if only I had my life to live over again!"

"You have plenty of time—*you* can change, mother," said Cynthia quietly. "Ah, God! I am too late!"

The sudden terrible despair of the last words struck Lady Allardice like the blow of a knife.

"Cynthia! Cynthia!" she cried in deep distress, "you break my heart. My punishment is greater than I can bear. Is it my doing? Ah yes, I know it. Had I been a better mother, you would not have to say that."

But Cynthia had recovered her momentary agitation and was herself again.

"No, mother," she answered slowly and softly; "each one of us is responsible for his own soul. It is I who have been careless, indifferent, distrustful. That which we sow we must also reap."

Lady Allardice was weeping bitterly.

"If I had only let you marry Reginald—"

"Mother, hush!" and Cynthia lifted one feeble hand to emphasize further her words. "I have no regrets. I love my husband. He and I are all in all to each

other. Things have all worked together for good, except for my wrong-headed ingratitude to Tremain in letting myself sink into this state of weakness. Life did not seem worth the living since Reginald and I were parted; and until a few months ago, I was glad to think it would not last. It is my own doing, and the worst of the pain will fall upon my husband. Ah, mother, if I had only understood before it was too late the wonderful, beautiful, terrible mysteries of life and death."

She was silent from exhaustion. Lady Allardice gave her nourishment, and she revived; but she could not sleep—she was restless and could not settle.

"Mother," she said, "you are not angry? You will not mind letting Ettrick belong to Gwendolyn and Bertie?"

"No, my child; you have done rightly. I shall only pray God now to spare your life, and to make me a better woman."

"And you will let Cicely marry Reginald, and not be sorry? He will make her a good husband and you a good son. They will comfort you if—when—"

"Nobody can ever be to me what you are," cried Lady Allardice, with a burst of deep and genuine distress. "O my child! my child!"

"Mother," said Cynthia tenderly, "God will comfort you. I cannot tell you how, because I am all in darkness myself; but he will. Aunt Magdalene will tell you. No, I cannot have you weep like that. I cannot bear it. Where is Cicely? Where is Reginald? I should like to see them."

Reginald Kennedy had been telegraphed for that day

and had arrived at nightfall. Cynthia had expressed a wish that morning to see him ; but since his arrival she had not named him, and they fancied that she had forgotten her wish. But this was not the case ; and she knew that he had come, and so she asked her mother in the solemn darkness of the night to let Cicely and Reginald come to her.

They came and stood beside the bed ; both were calm and pale, like Cynthia. Lady Allardice was still painfully agitated.

"Reginald," said Cynthia slowly, "I want you to take care of mother."

"I will," he answered fervently.

"You will be a son to her in every sense of the word, will you not?"

"I will, so help me God!"

Cynthia smiled and looked content.

"Poor mother," she said tenderly, "I do not think we have any of us done our duty to her, nor loved her as we should. You can make up for that now. You will take my duties for me, Reginald?"

He bent his head in assent, and went up to Lady Allardice and placed her gently in a chair, for her emotion was painful to witness, and she seemed in need of a son's strong arm.

Cynthia watched him with satisfaction.

"I want you both of you to kiss me," she said.

They obeyed, tenderly, reverently, as when kisses are made sacred by the thought that many more may not be possible.

"Reginald," she said, "I need not tell you to take care of Cicely. If I did not know you would do that, you would not be here now. She has not had a happy life; you will make it happy?"

"I will try."

"We have always been fond of each other, have we not, Cicely? though we have not been exactly as other sisters are. I think we have learned to know each other better of late. I am very glad it has been so."

"Dear Cynthia," said Cicely unsteadily, and said no more.

"Reginald—Cicely," said Cynthia with a touch of her old imperiousness, "when—if—if I die, you must not let it make any difference to you—to your marriage, I mean. This is my particular wish. You must not forget it. Promise me, Reginald—promise, Cicely."

They gave the required promise. It seemed as if it were the last thing Cynthia had upon her mind; for immediately her face cleared, and a strange smile dawned slowly over it, and remained there several minutes.

"That is all," she said softly, and looking towards Lady Allardice, who was still sobbing helplessly in her chair, she added,—“Now go and kiss mother.”

Cicely knelt beside her mother, putting her arms about her; Reginald stood over her, and laid his hand upon her shoulder. Cynthia watched them from where she lay with her great lustrous eyes.

Surely Lady Allardice's children had never drawn so near to her as they did in that sorrowful hour of darkness and the shadow of death.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### LIGHT BEHIND THE CLOUD.

"TREMAIN," said Cynthia in faint, whispering tones, "hold me fast, do not let me go. Ah, how dark and how cold it is beyond! Hold me fast in your arms. I do not want to go."

"My darling, you are safe with me. I will not let you go. You can feel that I have got you. You are safe in my arms."

Lord Tremain spoke with less of feebleness than he had done for months. The strength and firmness of his early years seemed restored to him. He did not yet realize his wife's danger, but he understood that she felt herself slipping away from his protecting love; and even this discovery came upon him with something of a pang.

"Tremain, I am afraid," said Cynthia almost wildly, "I am afraid!"

"My darling, there is nothing to fear. I am with you. Nothing shall hurt you."

But Cynthia was not thus to be reassured; her eyes were full of frightened dismay.

"I am afraid," she repeated once again. "I did not think I should be, but I am."

"Afraid of what, my life?"

"Of death," she answered in a low, awe-struck tone, "of death. It is coming very near me now, Tremain. I am afraid."

"Death!" he repeated, and his heart seemed to stand still. "Cynthia, my own, you are frightening yourself needlessly. You are not dying."

Her eyes sought his, full of a deep, wistful tenderness.

"Tremain," she said, "we have been very happy together."

"My wife," he answered, "my own life!"

"Yes, Tremain, I think I am your life. I think we shall not be parted long. If I cannot come back to you, you can come to me. I wonder, ah, I wonder, shall we meet there? Your place will be so much, much higher than mine—unworthy, ungrateful, unfaithful as I have been."

"Cynthia, my sweet wife, my guardian angel, you break my heart. You cannot leave me—you so young, so bright, so good. Think of me and of our child, and live for us."

"Ah, if I could, if I could!" she murmured, with an unspeakable yearning love. "Ah, Tremain, if I had been a better woman—a better wife!"

"My darling, hush! I cannot bear it. Anything but that. You shall not reproach yourself—you who have been as an angel to me."

He held her closely in his arms. He would not believe that she would ever leave him. In the silence

of an emotion too deep for words they clung to each other, as if that warm human clasp could keep away the dark impalpable presence which seemed already hovering over them.

Gwendolyn was sitting alone, in the shadows of the room, with the child upon her knee. The mother had been restless without it all the day, and its cot stood now in a corner of her room, and the little boy lay sleeping upon Gwendolyn's lap.

Tears were in her eyes ; for she had heard the words that had passed, and although Cynthia's voice had sunk now to a whisper, it was plain that she could not rest—that the haunting dread of parting and of death had fallen upon her, and not even her husband's love could drive the phantom away.

Mrs. Knollys entered noiselessly and came over to where Gwendolyn was sitting. She was to share the watch to-night ; and the doctors had told her plainly that some crisis must be very near. This state of wakefulness and feebleness could not be much further prolonged. A change must come shortly, and what that change would in all likelihood be none cared to ask. Hope was not absolutely extinguished. No one had said that Cynthia *must* die ; but every one feared the worst, because there seemed so little chance that the exhausted powers could rally again.

It was a night that Gwendolyn never forgot. Lord Tremain sat upon the bed and held the fragile form of his young wife in his arms. From time to time they exchanged loving words and tender caresses ; but Cyn-

thia's small strength was ebbing away very fast, and as her husband watched her, his head sank slowly upon his breast, and a sort of dull despair seemed to take hold of him.

By-and-by Mrs. Knollys made him lay Cynthia upon her pillows, and take a chair close beside her at the bed's head. Stimulant and the change of position seemed to rouse the patient, and she opened her eyes and gazed out into space.

"Aunt Magdalene," she said almost wildly, "it is all dark—dark! Where is God?"

"He is holding out his hand to you, Cynthia. He is with you now, although you cannot see him. Go to him in faith and hope and childlike confidence. He is waiting to receive you."

"I am afraid!" said Cynthia in painful gasps; "I am afraid!"

"Love casteth out fear," answered Mrs. Knollys. "Go to him in love. Take the love he is holding out; then fear will flee away."

"Love," echoed Cynthia drearily. "I cannot love God. My heart is dead."

"Christ can give it life. Trust in his love, not in your own. Our love is a poor, cold, feeble thing; his is deep and unfathomable as eternity itself. Lose yourself and your fears in that love, Cynthia. You cannot appeal to that love in vain."

"He cannot love me—sinful, worldly, careless as I have been. I dare not think or hope it. How can we know he will receive us?"



"He died to save us. What higher proof of love than that do you want?"

"I know, I know; but I cannot realize it. He died for the world; but how can I know that he died for me?"

"You have it upon the unalterable testimony of his own word—'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth *us* from *all* sin.' Is there any exception there?"

"I cannot feel as if it could be for me," said Cynthia with a weary, despairing sigh. "I know what you would say; I know that I should say the same to anybody else myself; but I cannot, I *cannot* see any light for myself. I cannot feel that my many, many sins can be washed away."

"And why not yours, Cynthia? Is the hand of God weak? Are you stronger than God? Is Christ's love so weak that it cannot reach you? Is the whole scheme of redemption, which has stood the test of eighteen hundred years of sin and shame, and has triumphed over both—is it to fail now? Are you too strong for God to conquer? Are your sins too black to be washed white by Christ's blood? Think, Cynthia, before you answer; for if this is so, God help us all, for the devil and man will have shown themselves to be stronger than God himself."

Cynthia was silent for a long while. Gwendolyn and Mrs. Knollys stood beside her watching her face, over which many strange expressions flitted. Her mind was quite clear, her faculties unimpaired. She could think and reason as well at this moment as ever in her life

before. Would she be able to tear away the veil of doubt and distrust which clouded her heart, and see the light that lay beyond? or would she have to pass away in darkness and gloom of spirit, to find the light only when the dark river was passed?

"Pray for me, Aunt Magdalene," said Cynthia.

They all knelt down, and Mrs. Knollys prayed—such a prayer as Gwendolyn never forgot, and never will forget to the end of her life.

There are prayers that seem to open the gate of heaven, or to bring it down within our ken; and this, as it seemed to Gwendolyn, was now done. She felt, with an undefinable sensation of wonder and awe, that the things unseen had drawn very close, and that some spiritual essence was already overshadowing them.

It was a long while before she raised her head, and then she looked timidly at Cynthia, wondering what change she would see stamped upon that face.

The change was not very great; only that the troubled, fearful look was gone, and was replaced by one of wondering relief, that spoke of awe, and yet of a peace too deep and too incomprehensible to be grasped all in a moment.

"Cynthia," said Gwendolyn, "when it was all dark to me, it was because Jesus had not come—because I had shut him out of my heart. When he came, he said, 'It is I; be not afraid;' and then it was all light. Is he saying the same to you now? Do not be afraid. It is Jesus who has come."

Cynthia smiled suddenly and radiantly.

"Yes; just that," she said. "I see now. I understand. It may go again; but I have seen the light. I shall not be afraid any more. Kiss me, Gwendolyn—kiss me, Aunt Magdalene. I would thank you if I could, but I can't."

They kissed her, and Gwendolyn brought the baby and laid him beside her on the bed.

"My little boy!" she said tenderly. "Gwendolyn, never let him grow up in darkness. I wonder if God will let me live to teach him myself. I think I could now. I should like; but no—'Thy will be done.'" And Cynthia closed her eyes. Was it in exhaustion or in prayer?

Yes; the cloud had lifted. The wasted face wore a new expression, and the watchers felt that the bitterness of death was surely past.

She held her husband's hand, and her child lay nestled beside her. All three were very still. It seemed as if Cynthia slept.

Gwendolyn looked at the little group, and the tears rose to her eyes. Something new and unexpected in Cynthia's face made her thrill with a sort of awe. It was a settled look of peace and rest, such as her face had not worn for many a long and weary day.

"Is it—is it—" she breathed, turning with dilated eyes to her aunt. "Shall I call Aunt Allardice and Cicely?"

"No," whispered Mrs. Knollys, leading Gwendolyn gently away from the bedside; "that is not death—that is a blessed sleep. God grant that it may not be a sleep unto death."

Mrs. Knollys' prayer was answered. That sleep was not unto death.

It was as if, the strain of fear being once lifted, the horror of great darkness removed, exhausted nature was able to rest and rally its sinking powers. That quiet, restful sleep seemed like a turning-point in Cynthia's illness. She slept a great deal after that; and after each sleep she seemed to have regained some slight access of strength.

For many days she was not considered out of danger; for many weeks she lay weaker than a child, as helpless as her own little boy. But hope beat high in all hearts. The doctor's visits grew less frequent; and it became known throughout the county that Lady Tremain was getting better.

Yes; Cynthia was certainly getting better—better in body and better in mind. She had gone down to the very portals of death, had stood, as it were, face to face with its awful mysteries, and had felt how powerless she was to face the unknown future without a stronger hold than she had had before upon the loving mercy of God. All her calm and almost indifferent resignation had deserted her in the hour of overwhelming fear; and it was only when Christ had, in his great mercy, revealed himself to her, that she had been able to face the thought of death with a calmness which had saved her life.

Gwendolyn was her constant companion during her long, slow convalescence; and very near did the two cousins draw together in those weeks of bright summer-

tide glory, when they felt each day a glad sense of renewed life and hope in the fact that they were still together, and that Cynthia's life had been spared.

Lady Allardice and Cicely and Mrs. Knollys had to return to their own homes and duties ; but Gwendolyn was free to remain as long as Cynthia wanted her, and there seemed no reason to believe that Lady Tremain would consent to part with her cousin before the time came to hand her over to the care of her promised husband.

"I hope Bertie is not in a great hurry to get married," said Cynthia one day, smiling with a very loving smile at Gwendolyn, "for I don't know how I am to spare you."

This was spoken upon the first day that Cynthia had been allowed to leave her room. She had been carried into Ettrick's nursery, and lay upon a sofa there, whilst she and Gwendolyn watched him sprawling on the floor in infantile play.

"I will not go till you can spare me," said Gwendolyn. "Bertie must wait, and I will tell him so. I should like to see you quite strong again first."

Cynthia smiled.

"Quite strong again. How pleasant that sounds ! Yes ; I suppose I shall be able to toss my boy in my arms before many months are over, as other mothers do. Ah, Gwendolyn, it seems as if you would not have the care of him now ; but I shall always think of him specially as your child."

Gwendolyn took Cynthia's hand, and laid her cheek caressingly against it.

"Yes, he will always be that to me ; but I am so glad he will have his own mother too, poor little darling ! Cynthia, things have all worked together for good in a wonderful way. I often think so when I go over what has happened during these last years."

"Ah yes ; God is very good to us. I have learned my lesson at last, Gwendolyn. How it was I learned it so slowly I cannot guess. My heart must have been very hard. Yet God would not give me up. He kept on teaching me, even though I would not learn. But he came at last."

"He always does, I think," said Gwendolyn softly.

After a silence, Cynthia said, dreamily,—

"‘It is I ; be not afraid.’ I have so often thought of these words. They seemed just made for me. I was afraid, and I did not know who it was that was near."

"They seemed made for me too," said Gwendolyn, "when I was in darkness. I think they are made for us all, Cynthia, to show us how near the light is to us, if only we will look behind the cloud."

"I think so too," answered Cynthia, softly and sweetly. "I shall never be afraid of darkness now. If it comes, Jesus will come too, and drive the fear away with his assurance, ‘It is I.’"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### AN HEIRESS ONCE MORE.

"AND Tremain has never found anything yet for Bertie," said Cynthia. "He must really give his mind to it. He is dreadfully absorbed in baby and me. It must not be allowed to go on."

Gwendolyn smiled, such a fond, proud, happy smile, it was like sunshine itself.

"Bertie and I are quite prepared to be poor," she answered—"poor in your sense of the word; for really we shall not be so very badly off. A large house, horses in the stable, and endless luxuries around one, are very pleasant things, but are not essential to happiness, Cynthia."

"Ah no!" she answered with a smile and a sigh. "Even I have lived to find that out. My Golden Gwendolyn, I think you will be very happy."

"I am sure of it," she answered earnestly; "Bertie is so good."

Cynthia looked at her cousin and smiled.

"Bertie has always been like a brother, and you have been more than a sister. You must always look upon Tremain as a second home, Gwendolyn."

"I am sure it will always seem like one," she answered. "I wonder whether we shall settle down here; we are both so fond of the country. When Bertie comes to-night, perhaps we shall know more. I fancy he has some plan in his head."

"You will be making your plans now, I suppose?"

"Yes. Bertie wants to be married in August or September, if you can spare me, Cynthia."

"I must spare you, my sweet one. I must not be selfish. I cannot keep you with me always, as I should like."

Gwendolyn caressed her hand, and went on talking.

"Bertie and I both want to settle where we can find work to do. I know that wherever we go we shall find plenty to our hand; but we feel we should like it to be work that really needs doing, that seems to want doing. Of course, if Bertie gets an appointment anywhere, we may be fettered by it, and his time may not be his own; but all that we shall see later. I am quite sure he will never be content to idle away his life."

"I am sure of that too. You say you think he has got a plan."

"I fancy so from the tone of his two last letters. They were short, and rather mysterious; but I shall soon understand what they mean. You know he has been at Wylmington for some time, with the Salisburys. I think he must have taken a fancy to the place, he has stayed so long."

"Ah, I wish you could go and live there," said Cynthia, "with all your old associations about you."



"I shall have all my old associations about me in any case," answered Gwendolyn brightly. "You know we shall be able to furnish our little house, wherever it is, almost entirely from things that will not even be missed from Wylmington. You know what accumulations of furniture an old house always suffers from. I can have all old friends round me, family pictures and plate. Oh yes, we can have a very pretty house without robbing dear old Wylmington of anything its tenants really need."

Gwendolyn spoke, as she felt, hopefully and brightly. Life had indeed opened out very sweetly before her, and her present happiness was of that deep, untroubled kind whose foundations are secure, and which, therefore, fears no tempests, and shrinks not before the uncertain future.

Bertie Heron arrived that same evening, in the golden-purple twilight of midsummer day.

The course of true love had run very smoothly for him and Gwendolyn during the past months. Cynthia's long illness had thrown a sort of cloud across their happiness; but nothing had disturbed the deep current of their love, and they had seen each other at frequent intervals since they had linked their lives together, and Bertie was treated by Lord Tremain almost as a son of the house.

He came suddenly upon Cynthia and Gwendolyn as they were sitting together upon the terrace after dinner, and he looked bright and flushed and eager, as if he had news of interest to communicate.

"Cynthia, how much better you look—almost like your old self!" he exclaimed gladly. "My Gwendolyn

never changes." He stooped to kiss her. "Then you really are off the sick-list, Cynthia?"

"Quite. I am well and strong almost; but *not* my old self, Bertie. I hope and trust that that old self is buried once and for all, and its memory consigned to oblivion."

Bertie looked at her and smiled, as if he understood what she would imply. Then he sat down beside Gwendolyn, and took one of her hands in his.

"My Gwendolyn," he said softly, "my Gwendolyn now, whom I cannot relinquish—not even though she be once more the Heiress of Wylmington."

Gwendolyn smiled tenderly at him. To her his words did not bear any special meaning; but they made Cynthia raise her head and look at Bertie with the light of eager inquiry in her eyes.

"Has anything happened?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered quietly; "something has happened. We have found coal at Wylmington."

To Gwendolyn these words did not convey any very great significance just at first. She looked quickly at Bertie for an explanation; but Cynthia understood better, and exclaimed eagerly,—

"O Bertie! Coal at Wylmington?"

"Yes; and as far as we can judge, plenty of it."

"Where?" asked Gwendolyn, rousing to interest.  
"Near the house?"

"No; fortunately not. Fully three quarters of a mile away,—beyond the limits of the park too. You know that hill, Gwendolyn, lying to the north and behind the house? it is beyond there that it lies. From

what we can ascertain so far, there is a very great deal upon your property."

Cynthia made a delighted gesture.

"Gwendolyn," she said, "the fortunes of your house are restored. You will live yet to be a millionaire."

Gwendolyn had not yet grasped the full meaning of what she had heard.

"I don't think I understand yet, Bertie."

"Do you not? It is only this, Gwendolyn, that as coal has been found upon your property, it has, of course, made it of ten times its original value."

"Must I sell it?" she asked almost nervously.

"Not at all, unless you wish to do so. We must discuss the question seriously, Gwendolyn, for it is a very important one."

"Shall I go?" asked Cynthia. "Would you rather be left alone to discuss?"

"No, no," they both answered quickly; "stay and help us with your advice."

"Now, Bertie," said Gwendolyn, "explain to me what it is we have to decide."

"The first question is this. Are we to keep the whole estate in our own hands, and work the coal ourselves; or would you rather keep the house and park and farms, and sell this piece of outlying land, which would realize a fortune in itself? It is for you to decide the matter, Gwendolyn."

"And you," she added pressing his hand. "It must be 'we,' not 'I,' all through, Bertie. Tell me what you think we ought to do."

"The simplest and easiest plan, and the one which would give us least trouble or anxiety, would be to sell the land as it stands, but—"

"But what?"

"I cannot help thinking that to keep it in our own hands might be the best for those concerned."

"How? Who?" asked Gwendolyn eagerly.

"For the work-people, you know—the miners and all the hands we should want for working the coal. You see, a mining village will spring up round the pit's mouth as soon as the shaft is sunk and the pit ready for working. Do you not think that a great field of usefulness might then open for us? In any case we could do a good deal for the people; but if we were really the owners, and had the power in our own hands, does it not seem to you that our opportunities might be far greater?"

"Yes, yes," answered Gwendolyn eagerly. "Oh yes, Bertie, let us keep the land, and do all we can for the poor people who will work for us."

"A model village and a model landowner," smiled Cynthia. "Yes, Bertie, I agree with Gwendolyn. Keep things in your own hands. It will be far more satisfactory for you and for all concerned. You will have your wish, I think, you two—to be blessed and to be a blessing."

After a pause for earnest thought, Gwendolyn said, speaking slowly,—

"But, Bertie, will it not take a very great deal of money to set things going? How—"

"I have thought that too," interposed Cynthia quietly. "You will want a large capital to start with; but Tre-

main shall be spoken to. I know he will be delighted to help in setting things going."

"You are a good friend, Cynthia," said Bertie gratefully. "I may perhaps borrow a few thousands of Lord Tremain, whilst matters are getting into train; but I have a valuable coadjutor in this matter."

"Who is that?"

"Montague Salisbury. It was he who really made the discovery as to the coal, and set me on to have people down to investigate matters. You know he was educated to be an engineer; but an uncle of his lately left him a large fortune, so that he has no occasion to take any employment. But he does not like idleness, and he has plenty of ability and energy. He has offered to take upon himself the expense of sinking the shaft, and putting things in working order, if we will let him have a share in the matter—what share to be decided later, when the value of the undertaking can better be estimated. He will himself look after things, and he thoroughly understands the subject. He is a man of unimpeachable honour and uprightness, and has been one of my best friends since our Harrow days. I feel very much inclined to accept his offer; but, of course, it is for Gwendolyn really to decide."

"Is it?" she asked smiling. "I think it is for you. Yes, Bertie, so far as I can judge, I think Mr. Salisbury's offer is a very generous one. I should like to accept it, if you think right."

"I do think so," he answered. "I only know imperfectly what Salisbury understands thoroughly. I

could not act without professional advice as to every step. He is himself a professional authority, and as a part-proprietor would be the very best man we could have to undertake the management. Of course his offer is a very generous one, and I think nothing would please him better than your acceptance of it. He would enjoy the work better than anything else in the world; and we may be quite certain that our interests, as well as those of our work-people, will be safe in his hands."

"Then let it be so," answered Gwendolyn. "Bertie, I am glad, oh so glad, that this was not known before, and that it is through you it has been found. It was you who told the Salisburys about Wylmington, so it is you who have really made this change. Oh, I am glad all is as it is!"

He knew what she meant, and smiled.

"And now, my sweet Gwendolyn, we can live at Wylmington as soon as you like."

Cynthia had risen to go in and tell the news to Lord Tremain. Gwendolyn felt herself drawn gently towards a familiar resting-place—Bertie's shoulder.

"My dear old home. Ah, Bertie, what a home it will be, when we share it together!"

"Let it be our aim in life, dearest," he said, with a simple earnestness that sounded almost solemn, "to make our home worthy the name, in the highest and holiest sense."

"We will, Bertie, we will," she answered with equal earnestness. "I know you will help me, as you have helped me before. It seems as if God was going to give

us a very wide field for loving service—wider even than we thought. Oh, I hope we shall not prove unworthy of the trust!"

"I think," answered Bertie thoughtfully, "that with increase of responsibility God gives an increase of power, if we pray to him for guidance and help in the duties that lie before us. We must trust to him, Gwendolyn, not to ourselves or our own powers. He will never desert us or leave us in blind uncertainty. He will make our way plain before us. May he grant us grace never to wander from that way."

Silence fell upon them for a while; and then Gwendolyn repeated dreamily,—

"'Blessed and made a blessing.' Will that be true of us, Bertie?"

"We have been greatly blessed, my darling. Let one great object of our lives be, to be a blessing to others."

"Yes," she assented softly, and added by-and-by,—  
"If only my father could see me now, and know that I too have found the great treasure—the light."

"Perhaps he can, perhaps he does—who knows?" answered Bertie gently. "May it not be possible that our loved ones can know a little of what happens to us, feel some faint reflection of our happiness in the midst of their own? I often fancy my mother is watching over me even now. Ah, Gwendolyn, if human love can be so strong and so holy, who can measure the ineffable love of God?"

"No one," answered Gwendolyn softly; "not even in the boundless space of eternity."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### A FAMILY PARTY.

ANOTHER month had passed, and a family party was once more assembled under Lady Allardice's roof; for it was Cicely's wedding-day.

Lord and Lady Tremain and their little four-months-old son were all there, and Gwendolyn, to whom Cicely seemed to cling more than to any one else.

A different atmosphere now reigned in that house, and no one was more conscious of it than Gwendolyn. The mother was no longer shunned and distrusted by her daughters; nor did she, by soft words not borne out by corresponding deeds, give them cause to distrust her sincerity.

Lady Allardice was greatly changed and softened. Her love for her children, which had always been genuine, was no longer warped and distorted by an overweening desire to see them in a position of high social distinction. She had learned to recognize what before had been but idle words to her, that

"Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman blood."



All about her felt the change, and Lady Allardice was no longer a lonely woman in her own house.

Cicely's wedding was to be a far simpler one than Cynthia's had been.

It was late in July, and many people had left town, so that the Allardice cousins were conspicuous by their absence. Many friends who would have expected an invitation were abroad or in Scotland; and so it was quite a quiet family party only who were to witness the ceremony, and in this fact Cicely rejoiced.

Gwendolyn and two little cousins of Reginald Kennedy's were the only bridesmaids; and Gwendolyn was now arraying the bride in her plain yet rich white draperies, whilst Cynthia in her gold-coloured brocade sat at a little distance, smiling with critical approval, and giving hints from time to time as to the disposition of flowers or veil.

"Ah, Gwendolyn," she said, "you have a happier bride to deck to-day than you had the last time.—Cicely, my child, if you mean to keep your start of me, and be a happier wife, you will have an ideal existence before you."

Cynthia's face had regained its look of health, and had gained an expression of peaceful serenity which was new, and gave a peculiar gracious sweetness to a countenance which had always been exceedingly attractive.

"Cynthia," said the bride, turning and holding out her hands, "my hope and my prayer is that I may make as sweet and dutiful and loving a wife to Reginald

as you do to Tremain. I never see you together but what that thought passes through my mind."

The sisters stood together, both faces full of a sweet and serious gravity. Cynthia lifted the bride's veil and kissed her very tenderly.

"Cicely, my child, I like to hear you say so, even though it only makes me feel my own unworthiness. You need have no fears for yourself. Where you once love, you love very faithfully. Reginald is worthy of you. God grant you may have as much happiness in your married life as He has granted to me in mine."

Gwendolyn stood looking on with a heart full of glad sympathy and comprehension. They both turned as with a common impulse and looked at her, drawing her close to them as they stood.

"Our Gwendolyn," said Cynthia, "our Golden Gwendolyn. Cicely, how are we to make her understand how much we owe her?"

"Owe me?" echoed Gwendolyn, with a little soft laugh; "you mean how much I owe you—you who have each given me a sister's love when I came to you lonely and desolate."

Cynthia and Cicely still looked at each other.

"Gwendolyn," said Cynthia, "you have been our guardian angel, Cicely's and mine."

"Cynthia!"

"Yes, our guardian angel," repeated Lady Tremain, with that touch of stately dignity which sat so well upon her. "I speak for myself, and, I think, for Cicely too. I should not have found the light—the light of

Love—but for you. You led me on. I could not but wish to see what was so plain to you. I was slower than you, for I had blinded my own eyes, and the scales would not fall all at once; but if you had not come to us, I should have gone on still in my blindness. I was never really discontented with it till I saw how dreary and sad a thing it seemed to you.”

Gwendolyn could not understand what she had done. To her it seemed as if she had learned far more from Cynthia than Cynthia could have done from her. She felt deeply in debt to the cousin who had from the first made of her a confidante and friend.

Cicely read in her face this surprise and confusion of ideas, and said smiling,—

“Gwendolyn, the matter lies here: you were in earnest, and sincere in your longings after truth; we were only half-hearted. You were seeking it honestly; we were determined only to accept it through certain channels. We declined to learn from, or to believe in, what came to us in any form which we did not choose to receive. I daresay you know what I mean. Prejudice blinded us, and we closed our hearts to many influences which might have done us good. Reginald showed me how wrong this was—you had shown me before; but I was too proud to own it. Cynthia is quite right, Gwendolyn. Your coming amongst us has been a great blessing.”

Gwendolyn's eyes were full of tears. What had she done, she asked herself, that such a reward should be hers?

"At least you have drawn us close together, Gwendolyn," said Cynthia. "Let us bind ourselves together now, to be always loving sisters one to the other, and to give one another all the help we can in the trials and uncertainties of life. We are *three* sisters from this time forward, and no shadow from within is ever to be cast upon our mutual love and trust. Is it agreed?"

So Cicely's wedding was very full of love and peace and joyousness. Bertie Heron was Reginald Kennedy's best-man, as Gwendolyn was her cousin's bridesmaid; and it seemed to both, as they stood in the sunny church and heard the solemn words pronounced which bound two lives so closely one to the other—it seemed to those true hearts but the foreshadowing of that future day which should make them man and wife.

It is seldom indeed that a wedding passes off amid such unclouded happiness as did Cicely's. But to-day hardly a tear was shed, and every one felt that in such an atmosphere of love and trust gloomy thoughts could hardly find a place.

That evening, when the house had settled down to its accustomed quiet, Gwendolyn went to seek her aunt, who was found alone, musing somewhat sadly in the solitude of her own morning-room.

"Ah, Gwendolyn," she said, looking up with a smile and a sigh, "I have lost all my children now."

"You have Bernard," answered Gwendolyn brightly; "and he is so much improved by his travels."

"A son is not like a daughter, you know."

"But you must not call your daughters lost," insisted

Gwendolyn. "You know you love them far too well to grudge them their happiness; and, dear Aunt Allardice, I think they will be more to you now than they ever were before."

"They are good girls," said Lady Allardice, beginning to smile. "Cynthia is a great comfort to me; and nobody could have been more dutiful and affectionate than Cicely since her engagement. Reginald will make her a very good husband. I never knew how to manage her, but he has made another woman of her."

"Love has done that, I think," answered Gwendolyn softly. "The best sort of love, I mean, as well as her love for Reginald."

There was a short silence after this. Gwendolyn sat at her aunt's feet, and both seemed thinking deeply. Presently the girl felt a caressing touch upon her head.

"It is no use my trying to make a daughter of you. You will be the next to go."

Gwendolyn looked up with a vivid smile, the colour mantling in her fair face.

"Yes, Aunt Allardice, I suppose so."

"When is it to be?"

"We have not quite decided. I think we shall wait till things at Wylmington are a little more settled. Cynthia is so good to Bertie in making him welcome at Tremain, that we are prepared to wait until we can go to Wylmington to live, and Bertie has a little more leisure from the works there."

"Your home is to be Tremain till then, is it, Gwendolyn? Are you a daughter of the house there? Is

it any use my asking if you will be married from here?"

"I have promised Cynthia, thank you, dear Aunt Allardice; and we are going to be married very quietly—we both want that—very quietly in the little chapel at Tremain where Ettrick was christened by Reginald and Mr. Carlingford. I shall like that so much the best; for you see both Bertie and I are orphans, and in one sense rather alone in the world although so rich in kind friends. I think we both just want each other, and a place which is our very own—a real 'home' to us. I am so glad that after all our first married home will be Wylmington."

"Ah, Gwendolyn, you will be a rich woman after all," said Lady Allardice with a sigh.

"By-and-by, perhaps," answered the girl; "but not for the first years, I think. We shall have plenty for our wants; but I think it will be a good while before the expenses of starting are all cleared off and we grow really rich. Except for being able to do so much more good, as I hope we shall, I do not think I care so very much about the money. But I am glad to be going back to Wylmington, to live in my dear old home, and be surrounded by dear old familiar faces. I cried like a child, Aunt Allardice, when Bertie took me to visit the Salisburys, to see the old servants' delight to think that we were coming back to live there soon. You will come and see us when we are settled down, won't you, dear aunt?"

"Yes, my dear, I shall be very glad." And after a

little pause she added, "Gwendolyn, I have sometimes wondered if you ever think hardly of me for the way in which I treated you last summer."

"Oh no, no!" answered Gwendolyn, quickly and earnestly. "Indeed I had no cause."

"I fear you had, my dear. Since I have begun to look at things differently, I have often been filled with shame and compunction for my conduct then."

"Don't, Aunt Allardice, don't!" interrupted Gwendolyn distressed.

"My dear, I often think about it, and I think it would be more off my mind if I told you how it was. You see I was bent on getting my family well married, and I was sadly put out by your engagement to Sir Kenrick Dalrymple. But I shall never forget my heartless conduct in almost turning you from my doors in the midst of your great trouble. I cannot understand how I could be so cruel. I believe it was that I was annoyed with you in every way—about Bernard, and about your engagement, and about your refusal to sell your property. I was tired of you as soon as you seemed to be a failure, and I wanted to hand you over to somebody else. I was terribly afraid lest my simple-minded Bernard, who had no idea why I wanted him to marry you, should really fall in love with you, and persuade you to listen to him; and I wanted to rid myself of you at all costs. I never think of that time without a sense of pain and shame. Can you forgive me, Gwendolyn?"

"Please do not talk so, Aunt Allardice. You were

very kind in taking me in when I was left an orphan. No doubt I gave you cause for annoyance; I was very inexperienced. And you see everything has worked together for good."

"It has indeed. What should I be feeling now if I had induced you to part with Wylmington?"

Gwendolyn smiled. Her thoughts had been of other matters. She said gently,—

"I have been feeling all the day what a change has come over us all since last summer. Even the house looks different. Aunt Allardice, I am sure we are all much happier than we were."

"Yes, dear; I think you are right. I know what you mean. We are all changed. I trust it is for the better. I am sure you brought a blessing with you when you came amongst us, Gwendolyn."

Gwendolyn went up to her room that night with a heart full of joyous gratitude. What had she done to deserve such loving words of thankful tenderness? Conscious as she was of many faults and many failings, she could not understand how she could have benefited other sinning souls. She had only been seeking for light in the midst of darkness—seeking it with a single-hearted steadfastness which is in itself an earnest of success. Only a humble-hearted seeker—no more. Ah, if there were only more of these, the world would be a different place from what it is.

Upon the table in her room lay Gwendolyn's beautiful Bible—her father's last gift—which went with her wherever she moved. Time and close study had left



faint, mellowing traces upon it. It looked now like an old friend, instead of a new book. It was a friend to Gwendolyn, a true and unchanging friend and companion, whose teaching grew dearer to her day by day.

Absently she turned the leaves, feelings of deep gratitude and happiness stirring within her, and her eyes fell upon words which seemed to her (as when do Bible promises not ?) as the echo of her own heart :—

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”

A slight rustle behind her showed Gwendolyn that Cynthia was looking over her shoulder.

Without speaking, she pointed to a passage on the same page, and Cynthia read it with her :—

“Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee.”

Cynthia bent her head and kissed Gwendolyn.

“You always do me good,” she said. “I came because I could not sleep without telling you so again.”

“Dear Cynthia !”

Cynthia drew a little away and looked curiously at her cousin.

"Has it not been a curious life for you—since you came to us, a year and a half ago?"

"Curious?"

"Yes, I feel as if you were the only one unchanged by all that has gone by. I—what vicissitudes I have gone through—married, all but dead; Cicely, Reginald's wife; all our home relations changed. And you—you are still the same, my gentle, pensive Golden Gwendolyn, and the Heiress of Wylmington."

Gwendolyn smiled.

"I have gone through some vicissitudes myself," she said gently.

"Ah, true, you have; you have had your share. And yet I sometimes think, looking back, that you have lived more in others' joys and sorrows than your own."

Gwendolyn smiled again, and said,—

"Other people's joys and sorrows have seemed my own, for I have loved them, Cynthia."

"I know it," answered Cynthia gratefully and tenderly. "I have had a happy experience of it. To me you always seem a living embodiment of the motto, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

## CHAPTER XL

### CONCLUSION.

FOUR years have passed away—years of mingled joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, sunshine and shower, smiles and tears. Four years—and now another midsummer sun is sinking to its rest, bidding a sweet and brief adieu to the world it seems to love so well at this season, and turning all it touches into the fairy gold that fades but never tarnishes.

Every midsummer during these past years has seen a happy family gathering at one of the homes of Lady Allardice or her daughters. But this year Gwendolyn has put in her claim, and it is at Wylmington that they have all met; and the quaint house has resounded to the merry prattle and pattering footsteps of three little visitors, who have shared the nursery accommodation of Gwendolyn's tiny pair of treasures.

Life at Wylmington is flowing very smoothly now. These past years have been busy and often anxious ones, and there have been difficulties to face and obstacles to overcome. But patience, perseverance, and a steady determination to do right, have conquered in the end;

and neither Gwendolyn nor her husband has ever regretted that they elected to keep in their own hands, and under their own control, the management of the pit and the care of the *employés*.

Upon this very afternoon they have conducted Reginald and Cicely Kennedy through the miniature town, and through the workings themselves; and have been well pleased by the young clergyman's approval of what he has seen.

"It is a great trust," Reginald said in his grave and earnest way, as he surveyed it all, "a great trust, lovingly accepted and conscientiously carried out."

"You seem very well known to all the people," said Cicely to Gwendolyn,— "very well known and very much beloved."

"It was uphill work at first," answered Gwendolyn, "and we are never able to relax our vigilance. But the people do trust us now, I think; and Bertie wins all hearts in time. I think the worst is over. I do think the people believe thoroughly in him now."

"And in you too?"

"Yes, I think so. You see I am Bertie's wife. Oh yes, Cicely, we have very much to be thankful for. We have each other and our children, and our work in the world. We are very, very happy."

"I am sure of it."

"To whom much is given of them much is required," said Gwendolyn gravely. "We often say so to each other. It is a very sacred charge that has been intrusted to us, Cicely."

"Indeed, yes; that is what I feel too in Reginald's new living. The people have been so much neglected; but I can see already a difference since he came amongst them. Oh yes, we too have our work before us. I trust we shall be guided and helped to do it aright."

"I am sure you need not be afraid," answered Gwendolyn, with the earnest truthfulness so characteristic of her. "We never ask for that help in vain."

Cicely smiled.

"Your faith, Gwendolyn, is a very living, hopeful one. I always think that whenever I meet you. It does me good, for I have less of it, I fear; and even Reginald sometimes looks careworn and anxious, despite his unchanging confidence in God and in right. But you are always the same—so full of hope and loving trust. Does it never desert you?"

Gwendolyn's sweet face put on a look of very earnest thought and purpose.

"You see, Cicely, God has been so very good to me that I *cannot* doubt or fear. It is not my doing, it is his. Ever since Jesus came and said, 'It is I; be not afraid,' I have never been afraid, and never doubted him any more. How could I when he has given me Bertie?"

This conversation had taken place in the afternoon, and now the evening has come.

Reginald Kennedy is pacing the terrace in earnest conversation with Sir Frederic Allardice, who is extremely fond of his intellectual young son-in-law. Lady Allardice and Mrs. Knollys are seated under a great cedar

tree, exchanging loving confidences, which have about them a pleasant novelty and freshness, because it is only of late that the sisters have grown really intimate. Cicely has gone to see her boy and baby-daughter in bed, and Bernard and Bertie are just finishing an animated, closely-contested game of tennis.

Gwendolyn betakes herself to her own nursery, where a little golden-haired Cynthia and a bigger Reginald are peacefully sleeping. As she bends over them, with a sweet maternal blessing, she feels her husband's arm about her, and turns and greets him with a kiss.

"Ah, Bertie!" she says smiling sweetly, "is it not nice to have them all about us? I like to think how many happy, loving hearts are met together at Wylmington."

"My wife!" he answers, "my own wife!" and those words seemed in themselves to embody a whole volume of tender meaning.

For a moment or two they stand thus, close together, her head resting upon his shoulder, his lips pressed to her brow. Then Gwendolyn looks up with a smile and says,—

"I must go and see what Cynthia is doing."

Lord and Lady Tremain and the little viscount, their only child, are of course at Wylmington. The old earl still keeps his health in a wonderful way, and though he has never recovered the vigour and strength he suddenly lost shortly after his marriage, he has escaped the repetition of the seizure which the doctors so greatly feared, and there seems no reason why his life should not be spared for many years to come.

His beautiful young wife is touchingly devoted to him, and those who visit Tremain always come away with the conviction that never was there a happier home than the one which centres round the hoary-headed father, the sweet young mother, and the beautiful little boy who adores them both with all the strength of a child's devotion.

Cynthia and Tremain are sitting hand in hand, and Ettrick is asleep in his little bed not far away—a perfect picture of rosy, infantile beauty.

As Gwendolyn softly enters, Cynthia holds out her hand, a very sweet smile lighting the thoughtful serenity of her face.

“Is it you, my Golden Gwendolyn? Ah, I was just thinking of you, and of some words of yours, spoken many years ago. Would you like to hear them now? ‘Some marriages are made in heaven,’ I said to you; and you answered, ‘I think yours was, Cynthia.’ You were quite right.”

THE END.

1 2





